

The Relief of Forgiveness

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[0 : 00] Well now we're going to turn to our Bibles. Edward is going to be opening up to us this evening Psalm 32. I read the last two verses of the Psalm but let's join in together and let's read the whole of the Psalm, Psalm 32.

And Edward's title this evening is The Relief of Forgiveness. And I think you'll sense that as we read through the words of the Psalm which is called A Mascul of David.

Nobody knows what a Mascul is but probably it's something to do with the tune or the type of song or whatever it is. But it's A Mascul of David. And he says, 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 from 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 acknowledge my sin to you.

[1 : 21] I didn't 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 a prayer to you at a time when you may be found. Surely in the rush of great waters they shall not reach over him.

You're a hiding place for me. You preserve me from trouble. You surround me with shouts of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you the way that you should go.

I'll counsel you with my eye upon you. Be not like a horse or a mule without understanding, which must be curbed by 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.

[2 : 32] Amen. May God bless us. These wonderful words of his to all of his people. Well, let's open up our Bibles at Psalm 32.

And as you know, my title for this evening is The Relief of Forgiveness, The Relief that Forgiveness Brings, Psalm 32. Now, as you know, the author of this psalm is King David.

David came to the throne of Israel in about 1000 BC. And his life was marked by great peaks and great troughs.

And one reason why the psalms that he wrote are so helpful to us is that he expresses himself very vividly. He doesn't wrap things up in dull gray language.

He fires stuff out in glorious technicolor. And this enables him to press the truth home to us and get it deep into our systems. Now, in this particular psalm, he's describing an episode in his life which involves a long journey.

[3 : 47] Just look at where this journey begins in verse 3. That's where he starts.

David is in deep distress. But look at where the journey ends. In verse 11. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

So groaning in distress turns into shouting for joy. What is it then about God that can lead a person from distress to shouts of joy?

The answer is the forgiveness of sins following the confession of sin. Let me tell you a true story.

When I was in my early 20s, I happened to meet a man at a party. He was a very old man. He was 90. And as I talked to him, I discovered that he was widowed, that he lived on his own in the depths of the countryside, and he was lonely.

[5 : 01] And he asked me if I would come and visit him, which I did several times over the next two or three years until he died. I got to know this old man quite well. And I discovered that he'd been a junior government minister in Mr. Asquith's government during the First World War.

But as a young man, he had committed a crime, and he'd had to go to prison and serve a sentence. And that was the end of his career in politics. He never told me what this crime was.

I was very junior, and he was very senior, so I didn't like to press him. But in his old age, some 60 years later, this crime still lay very heavily on his conscience.

And as I tried to share the gospel with him, I remember him saying to me in a voice thick with emotion, Edward, is it possible that I could be forgiven?

That's a haunting question. Now, I do hope that my old friend discovered that blessing before he died. I don't know whether he did. But what we do know is that David, in this psalm, is trumpeting to the world the joyful announcement that to be forgiven is to be blessed.

[6 : 15] He's not talking here about the forgiveness that people give to each other. He's talking about the forgiveness of God. Look at verse 2. Blessed, blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity.

Now, this may be a painful thing for me to say, but I want to ask you to think for a moment to recall to your mind the worst sin, the worst sin that you've ever committed.

Now, just remember that David, the king, had committed lying and covetousness and murder and adultery.

So let's take heart from David. This ex-murderer, this ex-adulterer, came to understand that his sin was forgiven. And that made him shout for joy.

And if we are Christian people, our experience can be the same as King David's. So let's trace this through in four stages. First, we see the Lord's heavy hand in verses 3 and 4.

[7 : 25] 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.

What a vivid description of a man in distress because of his sin. He was so troubled, he was so disorientated, so miserable, that he became physically very ill.

Now, almost certainly, there was nothing clinically wrong with him. Almost certainly, his heart and lungs and liver and kidneys were working fine. But he felt dreadful, as though his bones were shriveling up and rotting.

He was aching all over, neck and back and legs and feet. And look at verse 4. All the strength and energy had drained out of his body, dried up as a plant would in a hot country under a relentless sun, desiccated.

Think of David when we met him much earlier in the Bible, that active teenager with rosy cheeks who had killed Goliath 20 or 30 years previously. And look at him now, creeping about the palace in Jerusalem, avoiding people.

- [8 : 40] A servant perhaps appears. Your Majesty, can I bring you tea and biscuits? Maybe a lightly grilled rainbow trout just to help you feel a little better? Oh, go away.
- Go away. I can't eat. I can't see anybody. Tell the chief butler I'm indisposed. What was his problem? He tells us in verse 3, when I kept silent.
- No doubt he spoke a few words to his family and to the servants. But the point is, he was saying nothing to God. He was silent before God. He couldn't pray because he wouldn't pray.
- His relationship to God was in pieces. He was estranged from God. His conscience was so full of guilt and shame that he would not even lift up his eyes to heaven.
- Silent before God and yet groaning before men all day long, as verse 3 puts it. All day long. And he couldn't even get a good night's sleep.
- [9 : 41] Look at verse 4. Day and night your hand was heavy upon me. He'd wake up at 2 or 3 in the morning and the sin that lay like an evil beast on his conscience was still there, always there.
- As he puts it in another psalm, my sin is ever before me. His mind wouldn't let him rest. He couldn't leap out of bed in the morning and tear back the curtains and shout out, Hallelujah!
- What a beautiful day it is. No day was beautiful to him. He was a man in great distress because of his unconfessed sin. But, had God abandoned him?
- Had God forgotten him? Where was God in verses 3 and 4? Was he far away? Not at all. Verse 4 tells us just where God was. Your hand was heavy upon me.
- It was God who was making him groan. It was the Lord who was pressing upon him and filling him with distress. Now what a blessing that was to David.
- [10 : 48] It was mercy that moved the Lord to cause David such pain. The divine surgeon wounds so as to heal. Here was David running away from the Lord, refusing to speak to him.
- But the Lord was not turning away from David. He laid a heavy hand upon him which was a hand of mercy. Now for us, isn't it good to know that if we sin grievously, the Lord's way is not to abandon us but to cause us pain and distress so as to press us to turn back to him.
- The heavy hand is a hand of love and mercy. Now secondly, in verse 5, we see the Lord's forgiveness. And verse 5 is the turning point in the whole psalm.
- I acknowledged my sin to you. Now possibly he confessed it to other people but that was secondary. This verse is about confessing it to the Lord.
- I acknowledged my sin to you, Lord. Just think of this. David has been dragging himself around his palace for days, maybe for weeks. His life has become unbearable.
- [12 : 02] His pain of body and mind is more than he can sustain. But eventually, he seeks out a quiet spot. He falls down on his knees before the Lord and he pours out his confession.
- Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I'm a sinful man. I don't try to justify my actions. I don't try to excuse myself. I acknowledge the dark corners of my heart before you.
- Forgive me, Lord. Forgive me. And then look at verse 5. You forgave the iniquity of my sin. As we sang a few minutes ago, ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven.
- But to acknowledge our sin before the Lord is hard because it involves facing up to the realities of what goes on inside our hearts. It's a humiliating business to say to the Lord, I've sinned, Lord.
- I've done this or I've done that. But we shan't know the joy of the Christian life unless we're prepared to tell the Lord where we have gone wrong. It's not as if we're telling him something that he doesn't know already.

[13 : 14] Of course, he knows it all. We don't confess our sin for his sake or to tell him something. We confess for our sake so that our groaning should be turned into joy.

So let me ask this, friends. Is there something that you might have done possibly a very long time ago which you have always sought to bury? You've sought to put it so far from your conscious thinking that you hope you're never going to think about it again.

But you do think about it again. You open a cupboard and there's the skeleton. It never really goes away. Think then of Jesus dying on the cross.

Did he die for all our sins or only for the less serious ones? Well, you know the answer to that question. He died for all our sins.

His shed blood is utterly powerful. There is nothing so wicked that he can't deal with it. David was a murderer. He was an adulterer. But he was forgiven.

[14 : 21] And then he was filled with joy. Just look at the two most important elements in verse 5. First, I acknowledged my sin to you.

And then second, you forgave my sin. This psalm is in the Bible to teach us. It's here to give us an example to follow. David is saying to all of us, this is what I did and I'm writing this down so that you can follow my example.

Do the same thing. Forgiven. Forgiveness is always at the heart of our relationship with God. We never get beyond the place where we need to rejoice in God's forgiveness.

It's not just about the beginning of the Christian life. It runs right the way through the Christian life. Even in heaven, we shall never forget. Think of the book of Revelation. It tells us that in heaven, the Lamb of God will still have the marks of slaughter upon him.

We shall gaze on those glorious scars and never forget that we've been forgiven at very great cost. To be unforgiven, to be unconfessed is to groan.

[15 : 34] To be forgiven is to be filled with great joy and gratitude. Now thirdly, from verses 6 and 7, David speaks of the Lord's protection.

Verse 5 records this critical turning point in David's life. But as soon as that turning point has been reached and David's heart is flooded with relief because he's forgiven, he then turns to his people, the people of Israel, as an evangelist.

Are you godly, he says to them? If you want to live a godly life, then pray to the Lord, as I've done. Pray to the Lord. Now notice this in verse 6. Pray to him when he may be found.

Now there's a sharp edge to that phrase. It's a bit like the invitation in Isaiah chapter 55. Seek the Lord while he may be found. In other words, don't put off confessing your sin.

Don't procrastinate. It needs to be done now while there is still time, while there is still opportunity. Pray to him now while you can. And then, verse 6, in the rush of great waters, the waters will not reach you to overwhelm you.

[16 : 47] Now that rush of great waters is a picture of the final judgment. Jesus uses the same picture at the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

You'll know the part of it I'm referring to. He speaks there of two men, each building a house. One builds his house on the rock, on a solid foundation, but the other builds his house on sand.

And when the floods and the winds and the rain batter against those two houses, the first one stands, immovable. But the second crashes down with a great crash.

The rush of great waters reaches that house and destroys it. So look again at our verses 6 and 7. The godly person is the one who cannot be touched by the rush of great waters.

The godly person is the one who prays to the Lord while the Lord may be found. That is the one who is forgiven. And what does he say as he prays?

[17 : 49] Well, he sets it out for us in verse 7. He says to God, you are a hiding place for me. You preserve me from trouble. You surround me with shouts of deliverance.

That phrase, a hiding place, suggests great danger. You don't need a hiding place when you're walking down the street whistling nonchalantly on a sunny spring day.

But when you're in a tight spot, chased by bandits or man-eating lions, that's when you need a place to hide. But David is talking about something worse than bandits or lions.

He's talking about the day of judgment. There's only one place to hide on that day and that is with the Lord himself. Rock of ages, cleft for me.

Let me hide myself in thee. You are the hiding place, David says. You are my preserver, my savior on the day of trouble. And more than that, there's a sense of great joy in this salvation.

[18 : 52] Look at the end of verse 7. You surround me with shouts of deliverance. There seem to be other people there. He's not on his own. As he rejoices in finding the hiding place, he realizes that there are lots of others there with him.

And they're all shouting a song of victory. And deliverance. It is a joyful thing to belong to a very great company of people who are all together in the hiding place.

As it's put in the book of Revelation, a great multitude that no one can number from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages. So when the Lord forgives somebody, he then protects that person right the way through to the rush of great waters.

And the deliverance is so great that it's celebrated with shouts of joy by many people. We're now forth from verses 8 and 9.

David speaks of the Lord's instruction to him. This is part of what flows out of being forgiven in a right relationship with him. Look at verse 8. I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go.

[20 : 07] At this point in the psalm, it's the Lord himself who suddenly speaks. It's not David speaking to the Israelites here. It's the Lord who is speaking to David. And this is a great promise and provision of the Bible.

I will instruct you. I will teach you. It's not flattering to David. It's not flattering to us. It's assuming that we're ignoramuses, which of course we are by nature.

We don't understand God's ways unless he teaches us. And the Lord picks up and uses a common Bible metaphor here, which is the metaphor of walking as a description of the believer's life.

I will instruct and teach you in the way that you should go. I'll teach you the right road. I'll teach you how to walk in life. And he develops it in the next phrase.

I will counsel you with my eye upon you. That's a great phrase. I'm not going to take my eye off you. He's rather like a parent with a very young toddler who's taking his first steps and needs to be watched all the way.

[21 : 16] That's right, little fellow. That's right. Put your right foot forward. Now your left foot. Now your right foot again. That's it. He teaches us to walk because we don't know how to walk.

As you look back over the long and winding road of the Christian life, isn't this exactly what has happened to us? He's taught us from the Bible how to live life.

He's taught us that we're sinners who need to be saved, that we're weak, that we need his help to learn to please him. He teaches us how to be unashamed of Jesus, how to be unashamed of the Bible.

He teaches us how to be faithful and honest and loyal and true and persevering through hard times. He teaches us about money, about personal relationships, about sex and marriage, about prayer and evangelism, about the joys and responsibilities of belonging to the church and so much more besides.

The Bible is full of instruction in the way that you should go. And then in verse 9 he sends a shot across our bows. He says, don't be like an ignorant old horse or a stubborn mule which remains ignorant.

[22 : 34] The only way to control a dumb beast like that is by jerking its head round with a hard bit and bridle. Don't be like that, he says. Be compliant. Be ready to listen to me, to understand, to obey.

Be a glad and quick learner, eager to be taught, quick to change course when you see that you're in the wrong. Friends, is it not a blessing to us to have a Bible to instruct us?

So many folk in society today are unable to live a happy and disciplined human life because they're strangers to the Lord's instruction. They have no moral compass, no magnetic north of truth, just a turbulent ocean of uncertainty.

but the Lord promises the believer here, I will instruct you, I will teach you. His instruction is such a blessing to us. Well, let me just trace and review David's journey for a moment.

He starts in misery and groaning with sin unconfessed, sin hardly even acknowledged. But then there comes the great fork in the road, confession and forgiveness.

[23 : 49] And then verse 6, in his joy he reconnects with other people, with other believers and he encourages them to pray and to rejoice in being preserved, to rejoice in the assurance that the day of judgment will not find the believer washed away by the flood.

And then with his salvation now assured and secure, he passes on to other believers the Lord's call to listen to the Lord's instruction, to attend to the words of God with eager and open ears.

And then finally in verse 10, he reminds us of the great divide, the great divide that runs right the way through the Bible. Just have a look at verse 10 with me.

There are only two groups of people in the world and they are described in different parts of the Bible in many different ways. In some places as believers and unbelievers as the saved and the lost, the sheep and the goats, those who are in Christ and those who are in Adam, the friends of Christ, the enemies of Christ.

Look at the way they're described in this verse, the wicked and those who trust in the Lord. There are only two groups right the way through the Bible. Everybody in this building belongs to one of those groups or the other.

[25 : 14] And David tells us of the distinguishing characteristics of each group. The life of the wicked, he says, is characterized by sorrows.

Many are the sorrows of the wicked, the pain and desperation floundering around in a life without hope, without moral compass and without God. Just think of the society around us as a poignant sadness that runs right through the life of the world without God.

Our society is a veil of tears. As Jesus said, weeping over unbelieving Jerusalem, if only they had known the things that make for peace, but these things are hidden from their eyes.

Nothing is more sorrowful in the end than resisting God. But, verse 10 characterizes the believer as well. Steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord.

The Lord's committed, persevering, unfailing, covenanted love. The love that will not let us go. Isn't it madness to resist the Lord when you can put your trust in him?

[26 : 27] Isn't it madness to choose sorrow when you can choose his steadfast love, which will never be taken away? So, David's road begins in grief and groaning, but he faces the Lord.

He confesses, he prays, he then listens, learns to obey, and trusts. So, the road that starts in groaning ends in joy.

And this is why David says in verse 11, and he says it to all of us, be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Dear God, our Father, we thank you for portraying for us in the Bible the life of this man who lived life so colorfully, King David.

And we thank you that he has taught the church over all these centuries the joy and reality of your forgiveness. We think again of our Lord Jesus going to the cross, his body nailed up to that tree, bearing the penalty of our sins, a penalty that we could not bear ourselves, and yet he's done it for us, and you have shown us almost unbelievable mercy.

[28 : 01] but we do believe it. We do believe it and we thank you so much for it and pray that you will write this deep in our hearts to give us stability and joy amongst your people.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.