

The Blessing of Forgiveness

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- [0 : 0 0] When I told my oldest daughter who's four that I was going to be away this evening speaking at another church, she said, is that because the person who's normally there doesn't know much about God?
- So there you go. I assured her that Derek was completely legit and orthodox, but she's obviously worried about you and she sent me to straighten you out. So there we go. There are some passages in the Bible on the way where we might read them and we might think, what on earth is going on here?
- What on earth is this passage saying? I'm sure I'm not the only person that's had that experience or that feeling. One of the great things about this Psalm that David writes is that he gives us this brilliant introduction at the very beginning as to what it's all about.
- Have a look at in your Bibles if you've got them there at verses one and two. It says this, 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. David really gives us kind of like a headline for this Psalm and that's what we're going to be looking at this evening, really the blessing of forgiveness.
- [1 : 1 1] And that's what this Psalm is all about, the blessing of forgiveness. And so if you're here this evening and you're someone who is not perfect, if you're here this evening and you're someone who makes a mess of things, if you're here and you've not got it all together, if you can think of things in your mind where you think, I should not have done that.
- Well straight away, this Psalm is for you. It's a Psalm fought for all of us. It's a Psalm fought for Christians who have at one point experienced this forgiveness but who continue to make mistakes.
- It's also a Psalm for those who haven't yet made that decision. It's a Psalm that holds out this invitation showing what is on offer. It's a Psalm for each and every one of us here this evening.
- The very heart of the Psalm is the heart of the Gospel which is this, that this Psalm is telling us that we don't get the great blessing of a relationship with God by our actions but only through God's gracious forgiveness.
- In fact the apostle Paul in the New Testament writing in the book of Romans, he quotes these opening verses of Psalm 32 to emphasize that very fact that our relationship with God are righteousness.
- [2 : 2 6] He speaks about throughout Romans that our righteousness is not down to our goodness but it is down to God's grace. God credits righteousness apart from works, Paul says.
- And then he gives these verses as evidence that that has always been the case. It was the case in the Old Testament before Jesus had arrived, it was the case in the New Testament after the arrival of Jesus.
- It's only ever been through God's forgiveness that people can be made right with him. Even great heroes of the Bible, even those people that we look up to like King David who wrote this Psalm.

And so as we look at this Psalm, we get to the very heart of Christianity. Christians are not perfect people. Christians are forgiven people. And this Psalm speaks about that forgiveness.

And it really focuses in I suppose on what we might call the what, kind of the blessings of forgiveness. And yet before we dive in and look at that, it's worth us just thinking first I think about the how, the how of forgiveness, how is this forgiveness possible?

[3 : 33] And incredibly as we stand here in 2019, actually we see a fuller answer to that question than even David who wrote this Psalm in the Old Testament. Because we see most clearly how is this forgiveness possible by moving, by turning to the New Testament.

And we could look at any number of places there which would consistently and explicitly tell us that this forgiveness is only through Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on the cross.

In fact, that's just what Paul has been talking about in chapter 3 of Romans before he goes on to quote these verses in chapter 4. He says this, all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of his blood to be received by faith. And it's in that context that Paul quotes this Psalm we're looking at this evening.

It's only Jesus's sacrificial death which is able, as the Psalm says, to cover our sin, to forgive our transgressions. And that is the foundation of forgiveness.

[4 : 42] That is how what we read about in this Psalm, the blessings of forgiveness are possible, are reachable for us. So as we look together at this, these blessings of forgiveness, let's make sure that always we have that at the front of our minds that this forgiveness is not because of what we do.

This forgiveness is not something that we earn, but this forgiveness is all because of God's grace and the great sacrifice of his own life which Jesus made for us.

So keep that there in the front of your mind about that's the kind of the how of this forgiveness. Let's dig into this Psalm now as we look at the blessings of forgiveness. It really kind of three main sections in the Psalm, each highlighting a kind of an aspect of forgiveness.

And we'll look through those in turn. And the first is this, verses 3 down to verse 5. We see that God's forgiveness brings relief.

I have a look at verses 3 and 4. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me.

[5 : 50] My strength was dried up as in the heat of summer. David is speaking there about his kind of personal experience of a time when he's tried to conceal his sin.

When as he says he kept silent about it. I'm not told what that particular situation was, but David does give us the result. That my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long, he said.

His strength he writes was sapped as he feels God's hand heavy on him. He describes this incredible discomfort he was feeling. This distress which he felt as essentially he tries to hide his sins from God.

He conceals his sins from God. I don't think we're supposed to understand what we read here as this is a physical punishment from God because of David's sin.

I think instead what we're getting here is a glimpse of David's inner turmoil, his anguish, his groaning as he recognizes that actually all is not right between him and God.

[6 : 56] As he struggles under the weight of trying to keep up this kind of facade of perfection. They know everything is fine, know that I've done nothing wrong, that he doesn't need God's help.

And you know what's the result? Well, as we've just read it, it's crushing him. Each week at church at Huntington because we rent this building we have to carry everything in and out and we have to carry these Bibles in.

They come in boxes of 20, 20 boxes. So 20 Bibles is fairly heavy. The guy who helps me unload this stuff insists on carrying two boxes at once.

Because he carries two boxes, well, I have to carry two boxes. I don't want to be outbilled by this guy. But you know, it's a total killer and I kind of stagger up this fire exit steps and pretending I'm fine, my arms kind of aching, my fingers feel like they're going to drop off and he'll always see me at the top of the boat.

You all right? I'm like, yeah, yeah, yeah, fine. Finally, it gets to the top. I can just drop these Bibles just wherever and get some relief. And that's kind of what David is feeling here. And that's what happens to David.

[8 : 00] The burden of claiming he's got it all sorted that he's fine. It finally becomes too much. Verse five, I acknowledged my sin to you and I did not cover up my iniquity.

I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and then he gives the result and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

David is able to lay down his burden. David is able to enjoy relief from the strain that he's been under. Why? Because God forgives his sin.

And that burden of sin and that relief that forgiveness brings, it is still a reality today. If we don't accept that forgiveness, if we don't know that forgiveness that Jesus offers, well really what we're saying is this, that it's all down to me.

I'm saying that I need to be good enough, I cannot show any weakness, I can do this on my own. It's an exhausting position to be in. It's an exhausting appearance to try and keep up.

[9 : 07] And really any understanding of God or any understanding of Christianity or the Gospel or any understanding of life in general really which says that blessings come to those who are good and blessings come to those who deserve it, it wears us down.

That's an exhausting way of life. We can never reach that standard. We never know if we've kind of done enough to get what we deserve or not.

But David here is telling us and the heart of the Gospel is telling us that the blessing and relief, it doesn't come from what we do, from our efforts, from how good we are, it comes from forgiveness.

It comes from that recognition that actually it's not down to us, we've not got it all together. We accept that we fall short and instead we need to trust in God's promises, trust in that forgiveness that He promises to those who come to Him.

And I suppose the obvious kind of question then for this evening is have you done that? Could this be the first evening when you accept that need of Him, accept that forgiveness, experience that relief that comes from saying, you know what, I don't have it all sorted but with Jesus that's okay.

[10 : 25] Could it be the first time for you this evening or perhaps for many of us here, I've been Christians a long time and yet need to return to God once more, need to confess again, need to lay that burden down again.

Martin Luther, the great reformer, famously wrote that the entire life of believers should be repentance. This is something that we never get beyond, never move past.

This is not a one-off event, this isn't David writing a psalm about his conversion, about the time he became a Christian, this is the Christian life, constantly coming to God for forgiveness.

And each one of us needs time and time again, if we don't recognize our need for that and then all we do is bury ourselves again under this load, we lose that relief that God longs to bring us.

And I think as well, before we move on, I think as well this idea of ongoing repentance and the Bible's encouragement and enjoying that relief it brings is a real challenge for us as a church.

[11 : 30] While we should expect Christians to be growing, to be moving on in their faith, are we still giving one another that permission, that opportunity to repent?

Are we encouraging one another to actually confess to seek help? Think of the people in your city group, think of the people perhaps that you know best. Are they able to open up about their struggles?

So often it's easy for us to give people a period of grace and then the time has come, you need to have this all sorted by now. You need to have it together.

We so easily speak about sin as if it's something that affects kind of other people but you know we're fine aren't we? And it just closes down the opportunity for people to come and repent, come and find forgiveness, come and enjoy this relief.

Now instead as a church we want to be as David is, constantly accepting and reminding people of their need for forgiveness.

[12 : 30] He pointing people back towards the cross where that forgiveness is found. John Bunyan in his famous book Pilgrim's Progress as is so often the case expressed it far better than I ever could.

And he has this scene where Pilgrim, kind of the main character, really sort of making his way through life. That he arrives at the cross and there he drops this huge burden that he's been lugging around with him so far and he leaps for joy and he sings this.

This far did I come laden with my sin, nor could anything ease the grief that I was in till I came here. What a place this is.

Must hear be the beginning of my bliss. Must hear the burden fall off my back. Must hear the strings that bound it to me crack. Blessed cross, blessed tomb, blessed rather be the man that was put to shame for me.

Now God's forgiveness brings that relief, that forgiveness is possible through Jesus, through that cross, through that empty tomb. That is the forgiveness that David experienced, the relief it brings, which is available to us too if we acknowledge our sins to God.

[13 : 42] So that's the first section really, the relief of forgiveness. Let's carry on into the second section of this psalm and David moves here as well as bringing relief.

God's forgiveness brings security. Have a look at verses six and seven. It says this, 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 hiding place from me. You preserve me from trouble. You surround me with shouts of deliverance.

David calls people to pray to God. I think what he's talking about here is specifically a prayer for this forgiveness that the whole psalm is about. Notice who it is again, who is to pray for this forgiveness.

It's the godly. David doesn't say, now look, if you've really messed up, if you're a bad person, you better get on your knees and pray. David's message is that everyone, even the most godly, needs to call out to God while he can be found.

[14 : 51] You can see perhaps there's a warning there as well, isn't there? Pray to God while he can be found. Implicit in there is that warning that actually one day it will be too late.

One day the psalm says the rush of great waters will come and that chance will have passed. For those who have prayed, for those who have accepted this forgiveness, there is this great security.

The great waters shall not reach him. As in view here, I think, is really an eternal security. David with these rushing waters is looking ahead to that final judgment, that time when it will become too late to call out to God as these rushing waters come.

And we've probably all seen pictures or videos of the destructive power of a flood that just sweeps through. It takes everything in its path.

And yet the promise here is that on that final day those waters will not reach the one who's asked for this forgiveness. And because of this ultimate future security that we can have through God's forgiveness, well it means then that we can have security here and now.

[16 : 03] That we can have security in this world. David again relates his own experience of God as an example, as a picture of what's an offer. He says this, you are hiding place for me.

You preserve me from trouble. You surround me with shouts of deliverance. That sounds great, doesn't it? And actually though, it's incredible that David is able to write those words.

The Bible spells out that David went through a whole lot of trouble. David had a whole lot of difficulty in his life. He went through all sorts of tricky situations to say the least. And yet in all of this he's able to say that God delivered him, that God preserved him, that God surrounded him with shouts of deliverance, that God who forgave him never let him down.

And again the truth is the same for us today. If we do pray to that God now as David calls us to, if we pray for that forgiveness, well we can know that same security.

In this world security here and now security that is not based on things that kind of come and go and shift around, but on an unchanging God.

[17 : 14] And that is not to say that things won't be hard. That doesn't mean that we won't have family issues or financial worries or job stresses or everything else that comes with living in the real world.

But it does mean this security in this world of knowing that God surrounds us, of knowing that our eternal future is secure, of knowing that whatever happens to us through this forgiveness, through God's grace, we have this everlasting relationship with God that will never end, with a God who will never let us down.

And really this security is the foundation, it is the ultimate cause of the relief that we've just been speaking about. It's this security in the time of the flood which brings the relief.

As this kind of subjective experience of relief only comes because of this objective security God offers. Forgiveness doesn't bring relief just because it's good to talk, it's nice to get stuff off our chest.

Forgiveness brings relief because forgiveness brings a real change in our circumstances, a change in our relationship with God, it brings eternal security through that.

[18 : 28] And again this objective change is centered on the cross. Again it's there that the price was paid, it's there that our sin was dealt with, it's there that Jesus Christ faced these great waters on our behalf.

The cross achieves that forgiveness, the cross makes that change so that those who are forgiven have that eternal security. The waters will not reach them because Jesus Christ has been through them.

And God promises to see those who are forgiven through, to see them into eternity with Him. And again I suppose that the same question we can't move on without asking, do you know that security?

Is your life something that has a foundational bedrock of knowing what is happening to you in eternity? When you speak with this confidence that David speaks, even though the hard times he goes through this confidence and security that he feels.

Have you prayed to God for that forgiveness? If not, again remember that that invitation is open to do that while he still can be found, to do that before these waters come.

[19 : 40] And if you have done that again, well here's great encouragement, a great reminder that actually whatever might come in the week to come, the months to come, the years to come, that we can face any situation that this world might throw at us.

Despite how we feel, despite how others around us might react, despite how the kind of situations in our life may change, we can face all of these things knowing that we are secure.

Not because we're good people, not because we're kind of strong, not because we've got it sorted, not because we're trying really hard, but because of the cross and because of what Jesus has done, because that forgiveness brings security.

And that brings us to the end of the second section. And in the first two sections we see this has been David speaking, speaking from his wisdom, speaking from his experience, outlying these related blessings of forgiveness and of relief and security that forgiveness brings.

And then in the third section, starting at verse eight and nine, there's a change in speaker here. And actually what we have here is God's answer to David.

[20 : 51] And so this is God speaking. Speaking to David and by extension speaking to all those who enjoy the blessings of his forgiveness. And the final thing we see in this final section is that ultimately God's forgiveness brings guidance.

God's forgiveness brings guidance. Now let me read verses eight and nine. Again remember this is God speaking. He says, 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.

And these verses are here to show us that forgiveness is not the end of the story, but forgiveness is the gateway into a transformed life. And just as God is central in forgiveness, well it's God who leads us on as his forgiven people.

Instructing, teaching, counseling, always with his eye on his people. Now we're not forgiven just so that we can kind of go off and do our own thing, to do whatever we want.

[21 : 55] Now forgiveness brings us into a relationship with God and within that relationship he guides us. He speaks to us through his word the Bible, through other Christians in the church, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

And perhaps the key point here at verse nine is to listen to this guidance, to obey this guidance in the different ways it comes. I really like this kind of verse here.

There's a lot of images and descriptions and kind of allusions in the Bible which need a bit of explanation. We perhaps need to kind of understand the context of places thousands of miles away or thousands of years ago.

I really like this one that seems to work verse nine pretty much straight away. Don't be a donkey, God says. You don't really need a theology degree to get the gist of that one.

This emphasis is on constantly trying to pull away, constantly being sort of stubborn like a mule, constantly needing to be disciplined in order to be brought back.

[22 : 55] When I was growing up we used to have a dog and whenever you took him for a walk it was like trying to pull your arm out of his socket, it was tiresome. I've still got one leg, one arm slightly longer than the other I think.

God's saying here don't be like that. Don't be this donkey, this mule, this stubborn thing, listen to me. The key thing here to recognize is that this is not God being overly strict or controlling it.

It wasn't kind of good news about the forgiveness bit and here's the cost, here's the bad bit. This is for our own good. Remember the state David was in in verses three and four when he'd gone away from God.

He was groaning, he was tired, he was weak. Instead it's staying close to God which is the best place we can be. That ability to be near God, to walk in His footsteps, to be in His very presence is the greatest blessing of all of forgiveness.

God's forgiveness brings us relief and security and those who receive that also receive this guidance from God to live it out, to move forward in that.

[24 : 06] That leads us on to the final two verses, really a kind of conclusion, laying out the stark contrast between the two options available verses 10 and 11.

Many are the solos 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.

Some closest by reminding us that for those who accept this forgiveness and the guidance that comes, there's joy. There's gladness, there's rejoicing, this is the way to a fulfilled life, a happy life, a blessed life, or ultimately for the wicked, for those who reject this forgiveness.

It's only sorrow. And again this doesn't mean there are no hard times for those who stick close to God, it doesn't mean, you know, once we've asked God for forgiveness our troubles just kind of disappear straight out the window.

But it does mean that accepting God's forgiveness and carrying on in His guidance is the best way to live. It is a way to live which brings us relief and security and direction and joy.

[25 : 20] And again that invitation is there to accept that for the first time, to acknowledge, to confess, to pray to God. Recognizing we're far from where we should be, we make mistakes, we don't live up to God's standards but that God's blessing isn't for perfect people but forgiven people.

And that forgiveness is there to be grasped again and again by each one of us, it's needed by each one of us. Listen again to Martin Luther, the entire life of believers should be repentance.

Each day we all fall short, each day we all need to return. And each day these blessings of forgiveness are available to us anew.

And if we know that forgiveness, that relief, that security, that guidance, that joy, the call is then to live this out, to live in response to what God has done, to do this joyfully, publicly sharing with others the blessing of forgiveness that comes through Jesus from His sacrifice on the cross which brings us relief and security and guidance which is available to everyone, which is truly life and life to the full.

Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You that the heart of the gospel, at the heart of Your rescue for us is a message of forgiveness. Well, there's so much of the rest of the world offers a message of self-help or trying our very best or striving to reach certain levels of achievement.

[26 : 51] We thank You for the uniqueness of the gospel which tells us that You have achieved that for us. The incredible message of the gospel that says that all that is required from us is to come to You and to lay down the burden of our sin.

Well, we pray that You would show us time and time again our need for forgiveness. We pray that You would protect us from thinking that this is just a one-off thing that we've done and now that we're fine.

Well, we pray that daily we would be drawn back to You, to ask for that forgiveness once again and to be refreshed and enjoy those blessings in You.

Well, we thank You that this is all possible through Jesus, through His perfect life, through His death in our place, through His resurrection. We thank You that through that we see Your great love for us, the great love that made this forgiveness possible, the great love that wants to lead us on in our walk with You.

Well, as we pray, as we do accept this forgiveness, as we do turn to You, that we would enjoy that relief and security, but that also we would commit ourselves to that ongoing guidance, that You might be growing us more like You and that we would recognize that that is the best way to live.

[28 : 08] Not only would we recognize that for ourselves, but also that we would be eager to share that good news with those around us. And we pray all these things in the name of Jesus Christ who makes it all possible.

Amen.