

*Psalm 32:1 Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.*

*²Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him
and in whose spirit is no deceit.*

*³When I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.*

*⁴For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Selah*

*⁵Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord"—
and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah*

*⁶Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found;
surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him.*

*⁷You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah*

*⁸I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you and watch over you.*

*⁹Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding
but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.*

*¹⁰Many are the woes of the wicked,
but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.*

*¹¹Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous;
sing, all you who are upright in heart!*

Dear Friends in Christ,

[Introducing verses 1-2 of this psalm before reading them.] The word of God we meditate on is from the book of Psalms. Psalms are the Word of God, but they read a little different from many other Bible readings in some ways. Much could be said about that, but I don't want to recreate a high school literature class with lots of sleepy heads face-down on desks. So, let's keep to point of uniqueness. It was only in the last 10 years or so that this was explained to me. Most of the 150 psalms in the Bible begin with a two or three verse introduction. Which means that when you read many psalms, they start off here and then all of a sudden about two sentences in, the subject veers off over there. It seems a little strange but that's the way the Psalms work more often than not. What is going on is that the Hebrew likes to give a little summary or synopsis about the main thought of the psalm. After that short summary, the rest of the psalm tells the story from the beginning, or expands on that main point. That is kind of strange to us because in our American English ways. We like to tell the story, and then *end* with the summary; more or less, "And now, the moral of the story..." or "To sum it all up..." So, I am going to read the first two verses of the psalm, the summary. It tells you what God wants to tell you through this psalm of David. Then in the sermon, the rest of the story will unfold itself. I invite you to

keep your bulletins open for this sermon. So this is the theme:

“BLESSED ARE THE FORGIVEN”

(1-2) “Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.”

I. The author has given an introduction for a story. He’s told you what he wants you to absorb. Now for how he learned it.

In verses 3 and 4 the story begins with a man who got what he wanted. Of course, that’s not the beginning of the story, because the real story is about what he had wanted and how he got it. So let’s go back closer to the beginning of the story of the man who got what he wanted. He had wanted the girl, and he got her. It was underhanded how he did it, and even more underhanded how he covered it up. But now that they were married no one could say anything about it. No one could say anything about it because a) her murdered husband had been in the grave for nearly a year now, and b) because the man who got what he wanted was king. He was king in the good old-fashioned sense. He wouldn’t be facing elections in the fall or next year or ever. He couldn’t be impeached. No court would dare to declare his rule unconstitutional. The press wouldn’t print anything he didn’t want out. If people weren’t happy with him, they would just have to put up with him until he died, or until they died! This man was king, and he had all he had set out to get.

But the king was miserable. The king—King David of Israel, if you need to know who and where—in his younger years had known the favor of God. Back in those days he had slept the sound sleep of the innocent. He hadn’t needed to watch his words and ways because he had been so sincere, so innocent, so willing suffer wrong for what was right that no one ever thought to question his motives or actions. But in the last twelve months things had changed. Recently, when he stepped into rooms, the servants would stop their hushed whispers with looks of, “I wonder if he heard that.” The “Yes, sir!”s of his officer corps echoed with obedience but not the admiration of the past. And as for himself, well, he described it this way: ***(3-4) “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 sapped as in the heat of summer.” “When he kept silent...”*** when he kept putting on the false front, pretending that there was nothing to hide, when if any should hint at a challenge to his integrity, his eyes returned the challenge, “Just try it. I’m king!”

Very few are the people who have not had a season of life like that. Not being king, but refusing to give it up, to admit wrong. Maybe even every single person here can look back on a time of spiritual darkness when they courted the sin they wanted instead of the God they needed. For some, like King David, that season extended itself over months and years; long periods of time just to prove that I don’t need to bend my will to God’s restrictions, proving that I worked hard to get what I had and no mealy-mouthed Christian had a right to make me feel guilty about it. And yet for all the outward huff and puff, like that starving prodigal son sitting on a fence-rail watching the pigs eat, your ***“strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Selah.”***

What was that last word? *Selah*? What does it mean? No one is completely sure, but you find it often in the psalms. Scholars seem pretty nearly unanimous that “*Selah*” is a musical notation. Remember, the psalms were poetry, often sung like our hymns. Most of the time it appears at a break in thought. So those scholars think “*Selah*” was probably a musical interlude. So imagine a song like that. The choir sings, the verse ends, but before going to the next verse, music plays for a while. While the music plays on it’s like the words hang in the air. You can almost grab them. Your mind latches onto the last phrase the choir just sang and you think about it.

And so, King David, remembering that time when he had been living in sin, when his bones wasted away, when God’s hand was heavy upon him, when his strength was sapped as in the heat of summer, he tells us, “*Selah*. Stop and think about that.” Think about when the realization of sin sets in: the messed up priorities of your life, the needy people you bypassed, the person who unknowingly hungered for the Word but you only gave them 21st century psychobabble. Think about how those failures wear on you. *Selah*.

II. Once that has soaked in, David continues, remembering something else about that time when he got everything he wanted, but felt more miserable than ever. David remembers the knock on the door, or rather his personal valet announcing the arrival of Nathan, God’s prophet. Nathan confronted David with the ugliness of his sins, and the anger of God burning against him. David was frightened out of his spiritual stupor. Humbled, King David said simply, “*I have sinned against the LORD.*” He didn’t know what else to say. Do you know what happened next? The prophet with the cloud of God’s righteous fury hanging over him said, “*The LORD has taken away your sin.*” It was over. Some say that right before the tornado hits it sounds like a freight train, others say there is silence. Let’s go with the second. God’s fury was like the silence of a storm right before the tornado, only there’s no tornado, and you look out the window and there are not even clouds, it has inexplicably vanished. Only the sunshine of forgiveness. “*Selah.*”

(5) “*Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD—and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah.’*” God’s plan is that easy, that sudden, that full of mercy. After the fact David realized the key lay in God’s forgiveness, not in his, David’s, making up for sin, or trying harder in the future; just God’s declaration of forgiveness to a repentant heart.

I can remember back early in high school, living in a dormitory, having an argument with a good friend. What the argument was about, I cannot remember in the least. I went back to my room, maybe 20 minutes, maybe a couple hours (I can’t remember). Finally I went back to his dorm room and started apologizing for being so stupid. He took me out of his room and into the north-end stairwell there on the second floor, made sure the door was closed and... he heard me out and before I was done gave me a great big bear hug lifting me off the floor (I’m not a hugger) and he forgave me and apologized for his part in the argument, though it was minimal, and then we back to his room and our comic books and it was forgotten.

The prodigal son experienced it. He knew his father was a good man, a kind man, and so that son just hoped maybe he could express his remorse over disgracing the family and

wasting a literal fortune—and maybe he could find a cot out in the bunkhouse. But that’s not what he got. He got a hug a real hug, not one of these shoulder-to-shoulder things. He got a gold ring of authority, the sandals of a land holder, the robe of the privileged; he got a feast of celebration, and restoration so complete that he probably needed to sit down. That’s not what he had expected. It was too easy, too complete.

The Apostle Paul in the book of Romans chapter 4, quotes this psalm, Psalm 32, as proof that salvation was the same in the Old Testament for David and Abraham as it is for us in the New Testament. Ever since the first promise of a Savior in the Garden of Eden, it has been the same (Brug, 348), hope in a Savior. Of course, we have been blessed know the Savior by name, while David who lived a thousand years before Christ knew him only as the Promised One. Yet it is clear from our reading that David knew the solution to his sin problem lay in what God did for him, not what he did for God. **“Selah.”**

III. Having experienced all that, surprised by God’s grace, David invites all to know what he had learned. Now, someone is going to complain about David. “What can I learn from David? He had an affair. He murdered the husband. He lived a lie. He was a hypocrite. Who’s he to talk?” But that’s what people who complain about hypocrites in the church don’t get. They don’t get that Jesus died for sinners, not for perfect people. But David doesn’t get bitter about it. He pleads with them to get off their high horses, (6-7) **“Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you(, LORD,) while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah.”**

This time, instead of changing his thought he explores the same thought. (8-9) **“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. Do not be like the horse or the mule.”** We have impolite terms for mules or donkeys, don’t we? Don’t be like them. **“Do not be like the horse or the mule which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.”** Here David was surely thinking of himself as the number one donkey. He had needed a bit and bridle. He had needed to feel the God’s hand smack his backside and have a prophet standing in his living room. David pleads, “Don’t be like that. Forgiveness sets you free!” Don’t be like a brute beast for two reasons, because: (10) **“Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD’s unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.”**

You might say Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son is just that, a story. But in Psalm Thirty-Two David says, “I experienced it. I lived it.” He knew the refreshment forgiveness. It was a declaration that the hostilities were over, that he was at peace with God—POWs freed, lives to be lived. Why would anyone not rush to God confessing sins, to have that freedom.

Listen again to the lesson David learned, where we would put it if it were up to us, not at the beginning, but at the end of the story:

“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him.” Amen.