

The Repenting King

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[0 : 0 0] Well, as we open Psalm 32 together, I want to begin with a scene from a film that I watched recently, a film called Miss Sloan. Maybe some of you have seen it. If you haven't, it's five years old and the time for spoilers has passed. Sloan is a political lobbyist in America. And throughout the film, you see her taking bigger and bigger and more dangerous risks in the service of getting what she wants. And finally, she's charged with fraud and is brought to trial before a court. She sits in a packed courtroom. The cameras are flashing before her accusers. And she says this. It's been insinuated in the press and in this courtroom that I'm a parasite on American democracy, that my interest in this cause was only in the interest of my career.

Sometimes we act not for ourselves, but in the interests of others. I believe that this was the right thing to do. But I also recognize that this wasn't what motivated me. I was enthralled to the challenge. My decision was based on my desire to win, to win bigger than I had before.

It's clear that my behavior has fallen well short of acceptable ethical standards. I've crossed lines with devastating consequences in service of my obsession.

I've betrayed the people closest to me. I've endangered lives. I deserve your censure for this, far more than for any filing irregularity.

What she brings forward in the courtroom is not a defense, but a confession.

[2 : 1 2] She confesses not only to the crime that she's accused of, but to a whole list of corrupt and harmful habits and ways of treating others. And it makes it a breathtaking climax, because just when you most want this character to get what she deserves for all her hard-heartedness and backstabbing, she comes clean. All the ammunition that you've built up in the film is suddenly drained away, because this person who you've grown to love and hate confesses to the crime. It's completely disarming.

Confessions are powerful. And what we find in Psalm 32 is that that's not only true on a human level, but in our relationship with God. You see that there in verse 5, King David says to God, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the guilt of my sin. David confessed, and God forgave. He cleared him of his guilt. And so he can celebrate at the beginning of this psalm, blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against him, and in whose spirit is no deceit. The wonderful message of this psalm that we celebrate this evening is we are blessed when we confess.

And there are two lessons that flow out of that here for us in Psalm 32. We are blessed when we confess, therefore, firstly, confess your sin freely. Confess your sin freely. Now, this isn't the first psalm that we've met, is it, that begins with the word blessed. If you remember way back in the beginning in Psalm 1, we found that the very first word in the whole book of Psalms is blessed. Now, back in Psalm 1, we saw the one is blessed who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, or stands in the way of sinners, or sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord. The blessed one steers clear of sin and loves God's word.

But here we bump up against reality, don't we? Because even the king still sins. Throughout the psalms, and in fact, the whole Bible, King David serves as a shadow and a pattern of the coming king, Jesus. But this psalm reminds us that David isn't Jesus. Whereas Jesus never sinned, he was and is sinless. He's the only one. David did sin. And so where does that leave him before God? He has walked and stood and sat in sin. His believing and behaving and belonging are still tainted by his corruption. Notice the three ways he describes his sin in verses 1 and 2. Three words, transgressions, sins, and sin. He's multiplying the vocabulary. He's telling us his sin is not a simple tidy problem. No, sin has grown arms and legs in him. It shines through his life in lots of different ways, not just one way. And having read Psalm 1, we would naturally think then, wouldn't we, that Psalm 32 ought to begin, cursed is the one? Condemned is the one who transgresses and sins. But

it doesn't, does it?

[6 : 25] He's blessed. How can that be? Well, it was because there are another three words or phrases in those same verses that blot out David's sin, Luke. Forgiven, covered, does not count against him.

And it is those three words alone that are enough to reverse the whole verdict on David's life, no longer condemned and cursed, but forgiven and blessed.

This is wonderful news for all of us this evening, that we can know God's blessing because he forgives our sins. Now, I wonder, has that thought lost its power on us? There's a simple and obvious but powerful line towards the end of the Apostles' Creed, a creed that expresses such grand beliefs in God, the Trinity, the saving work of the Son, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Church. And then we confess, I believe in the forgiveness of sins. I believe in the forgiveness of sins. Think about what we're saying.

I believe that when I sin, it doesn't count against me forever. It doesn't sit forever in the debt column because God forgives. Can we say that or think it without laughing or crying or singing for joy? We do not have to balance the books before we are right with God again. We so easily forget how unique this belief, this belief, this idea is to the Bible. Paul later quotes this psalm to make this same point.

[8 : 28] In Romans 4, Paul is arguing that becoming right with God is not a question of doing enough good deeds to outweigh our bad deeds or by works, as he puts it. Becoming right with God is a question of trusting trusting Jesus' work on the cross. And God's promise to put us right with him when we turn from our sin to Jesus. And then in the middle of this argument, he says, verse 6, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works, blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin. See, when Paul read Psalm 32, the thought that went through his head was, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And the word that Paul uses for that, for this psalm, is justification. Justification. A long word that simply means God doesn't count our sins against us because he counted all the sins of all his people against Jesus. On the cross, his debt column was filled and overflowing with our sins. And on the cross, he paid, he cleared that debt in full. And if our faith is in Jesus, then in place of our sin, God credits to us his righteousness, the perfect and sinless record of his own son, so that our credit column is full and overflowing, not with our good works, but with his good life. That is how God puts us right with him.

That is how we are blessed. Because he has not counted our sin against us. Rather, he counted it against his own son and counted his righteousness to us. This song of a sinful king is only made possible by the finished work of the finished work of the true and righteous king, Jesus Christ. And so it's in him that we can sing this psalm and say so boldly, I believe in the forgiveness of sins. And David, as he teaches us, that forgiveness doesn't become ours through our efforts, but through our faith.

Who is it that enjoys this forgiveness? Verse 2, the one in whose spirit is no deceit. Not the one who tries hard to make up for it somehow, but the one who comes clean.

Now, if we're honest, there's a part of us, even as Christians, that would rather that God asked us to do something. We are legalists at heart.

[11 : 46] We don't like being debtors. We want to pay our own way. Coming to God with nothing in our hands, but our sin is against our sinful nature.

There's a lawyer living in each of us, standing by to argue our case, to negotiate a settlement. But when we don't confess our sin, when that lawyer stands up to defend us, well, even though God doesn't punish us for our sins, our sins still displease him.

We can't break off ever our union with Christ, but we can harm our communion with him. And that's what David's describing there in 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. My strength was sat as in the heat of summer.

When David kept quiet, his sin ate away at him. Body and soul, the Lord's hand rested heavy on him. And perhaps you know what it feels like to keep something from someone.

[13 : 04] It puts distance between us, doesn't it? We fear at what confessing might do to our relationship. We worry that we'll never be seen in the same way again.

How can we possibly own up to something this big? Well, when we're hiding from God, that same fear and coldness and sense of distance and fear that can creep into our relationship with him. Even as Christians, forgiven of all our sins, it can take a long time for our inner lawyer to lose the habit of standing up and trying to put up a defense.

So often we still try to cover up our sin, don't we? What was our very first instinct when human beings first sinned?

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord among the trees of the garden.

[14:13] And ever since, that has been our habit, our instinct to hide from the Lord. But we do so needlessly.

How can we hide from the one who sees and who knows us completely to the depths of our hearts? How can we hide from the one who comes time and time and time again to seek us and to save us from our sins?

Our refusal to confess only puts us further away from the one we really need. Perhaps someone has told you at some point in your life, what hurt me wasn't so much that you did it.

What hurt me is that you lied about doing it. Well, the Lord is hurt by both. But the lying only adds insult to injury.

And so in the end, David finds that trying to hide from God is just not worth it. He decides to come clean, verse 5. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity.

[15:25] I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord. And he forgave the guilt of my sin. Straight away, the moment of confession, the air is cleared and the weight is lifted.

He can breathe again. All because he confessed. See, the truth about confessing is that with God, it can never make things worse.

Because there's nothing he doesn't already know. Confessing to God can only ever make things better because when we confess, he is gracious and merciful to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

It's when we uncover our sins before the Lord that he covers our sins for us. Do you notice that? Verse 5, I did not cover up my iniquity.

Verse 1, blessed is the one whose sins are covered. Covered not by David, but by the Lord. So David is celebrating a relationship restored, put back together.

[16:39] He has a close walk with God again, not because he balanced the books, but because he confessed to God that he couldn't do it and came hoarding only his sins to ask for his forgiveness.

And the Lord forgave him everything. Now I hope it's obvious by now where this is going. But David takes us there himself, doesn't he?

Verse 6, Therefore, let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found. David calls on all of us this evening to come and confess our sin freely to the Lord.

To come to God with nothing but a broken heart and sin-stained hands and to receive his forgiveness and his blessing.

As David writes elsewhere in Psalm 51, For you, Lord, will not delight in sacrifice or I will give it. You will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God.

[17:57] You will not despise. Perhaps this evening you have never confessed your sins to God. Well, here's your opportunity to do so, to come to God and come clean.

Whoever you are and whatever you have or haven't done, he promises to forgive when we confess, trusting in the finished work of his son Jesus.

Perhaps confession is a daily part of your prayers. And if that is you, then know that there has never been a day when you have confessed and God has not forgiven.

When he has not cleared your guilt away and come near to you again. To tweak a line from the Book of Common Prayer, he is always more ready to forgive than we are to confess.

So if you are in the habit of daily confession, don't lose that habit. And if it's not yet part of your prayers to confess to God, let it be.

[19:12] Don't let distance grow and things be left unsaid. Don't hide or pretend that it's okay. No, come and confess your sins daily and know the blessing of the Lord's forgiveness.

Of course, it's good and it's healthy to be confessing our sins to one another. But you don't need to confess to anyone else before you come and confess to the Lord.

You can go straight to him through the cross of Jesus and tell him. Tell him everything, your failures, wrong things you've done, right things you've left undone. And know that when you do so, he forgives. So firstly, let's learn to confess our sins freely to God. And in doing so, let's secondly enjoy the Lord's forgiveness.

Enjoy God's forgiveness. David goes on from verse 6 to list three great blessings we enjoy with God's forgiveness.

[20 : 24] Firstly, safety from God's judgment. When the faithful confess, verse 6, surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them.

And now those mighty waters here represent at the torrent of God's just anger that our sins provoke. We see that connection between God's justice and waters most powerfully in the flood, don't we?

Genesis chapter 6 tells us, the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth and it grieved him to his heart. And the expression of his grief or his anger was sending water to flood the earth.

And so these rising waters come to represent God's angry judgment and his just judgment against sin. But here, look, when the faithful confess their sins to God, the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them.

[21 : 45] If our sins are forgiven as God promises they are, then we are kept safe from his judgment. The anger with which he once flooded the earth will not come against us.

It's a sobering reminder of the seriousness of our sin. That what we deserve is God's unending punishment. And it's a hard reminder of what awaits so many who have never confessed their sins to the Lord and asked his forgiveness.

Wouldn't we love for those who we know and love to be forgiven and to be safe on the judgment day? Well, how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?

Asks Paul. And how are they to hear without someone speaking? At the end of that film, Miss Sloan, what's striking is that even though her character is redeemed, her career is still ruined. She confessed to everything, but she still goes to prison. But with the Lord, that doesn't happen. When we confess to him, not only are we forgiven, but the punishment is taken away as well.

[23 : 09] You are my hiding place, says David. You will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. And the second blessing that David lists is just as wonderful as that, but perhaps more challenging.

Notice in verse 8, who is it who's speaking? It's as if the Lord himself replies here to David. He begins to speak in the first person.

I will, I will. And what will he do? Well, he will instruct, teach, counsel. I heard someone pray this once and it stuck with me.

And I think it, it really captures what this verse teaches us. Lord, thank you that you love us too much to leave us as you found us.

Thank you that you love us too much to leave us as you found us. Because when we confess our sins, the Lord does not leave us to get on with it. This isn't forgive and forget.

[24 : 20] It's forgive and repent. True confession involves not only owning up to what we've done, but working out what we're going to do from now on.

And here, the Lord promises not to leave that down to us. He doesn't take his loving eye off us as we walk through the days and weeks following our sin. And to put it this way, if verse one is celebrating our justification, or verse eight is promising our sanctification.

And that, again, is wonderful news for us, isn't it? If we know our sin has broken God's heart, here is the promise that one day, one day, it won't happen again.

that's extremely comforting, but it also comes with a challenge. If the Lord leads us and instructs us and teaches us, well, what does he require of us?

Look with me at verse nine. The Lord says, 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.

[25 : 31] We can do this the easy way, he says, or the hard way. So don't make it more difficult than it needs to be. Don't be like a stubborn mule that needs a firm hand and a bit and a bridle to take it anywhere.

The Lord wants our intelligent submission, our willing humility. When we take Dudley, our dog, on walks on the road, he needs to be kept on the lead because he doesn't understand where he isn't meant to go.

We don't want him to go in the road, but when somebody has dropped something tasty in the road, well, he's off to get it because he doesn't understand that going in the road, even for a snack, is a really bad idea.

But the Lord wants us to understand not to need to be on the lead. He doesn't want our stubborn resistance, nor does he want our mindless obedience.

Instead, he wants our willing and intelligent submission to understand his will for us and then submit our will to him.

[26 : 53] as 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 and verse 3 tells us, this is the will of God. This is the will of God, your sanctification.

So let's embrace his loving instruction that we might grow out of our sins as we grow up in Christ. And the final blessing, verse 10, is the Lord's unending love.

Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unending love surrounds the one who trusts in him. We might fail him, but his love never, ever fails us.

Our faithfulness may fail, but he is always faithful in his love for us. His love surrounds the one who trusts in him.

Not those who don't ever sin or don't ever have to confess, but those who trust in his promise to forgive and come to him freely to confess in and through Jesus Christ.

[28 : 02] So three great blessings of forgiveness. And the great application is verse 11, enjoy it. Enjoy it.

Rejoice in the Lord and be glad you righteous. Sing, all you upright in heart. Rejoice, be glad, sing. David calls us this evening, if we are forgiven, to celebrate our forgiveness, to rest in Christ and rejoice in the blessing of a right relationship with God.

These are truly thoughts to make our hearts sing. So do they? Do you enjoy your forgiveness? this freedom that we have to come to God without fear? The safety that we have forever from his anger, the promise that we will not always sin as we do today, being surrounded every day by his unending love.

How can we enjoy these thoughts or perhaps grow and increase our joy in them? we can start by reading Psalm 30 T, reading Romans 4, reading 1 John 1 and 2, dwelling on these passages that say to us in different ways you are forgiven in Jesus and simply thanking God for that truth.

[29 : 33] We can come together in the week and on a Sunday and sing about our forgiveness. We can sing for ourselves and to one another that we have a refuge in Christ from our sins and we can remind one another as we confess to one another and pray for one another and share together through life.

We can help one another to remember and enjoy that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Because this is news worth celebrating.

We are blessed when we confess. So let's praise the Lord together now as we pray and then sing to him for all the love and grace he has shown us.

Let's pray together. God our Father, we thank you from the depths of our heart that you are not a God who delights in vengeance, that you do not delight to show your wrath and anger, that you are not quick to anger, you are not trigger happy, that you are ever so patient, so gentle, so loving, so kind.

To us, you do not deserve the least of your goodness, you show your grace. Lord, we come to you with our many sins.

[31 : 16] We pray, Father, that you would help us to confess to you, not to hide from you, but to delight in coming to you and sharing with you all that we are, knowing that you will forgive and accept when we come to you in Jesus.

We thank you, Father, for your promise that one day we will be free from sin. We pray, help us to put our hope in that word. Help us to long for that day and to live for it every day as we walk with you.

Teach us, we pray, for we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.