

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Meditations in the Psalms: Psalm 32:1-11 - Sins confessed and forgiven

Introduction

Good morning. This is the final Psalm in the current series on "Meditations in the Psalms". Today we come to Psalm 32 with the title "Sins confessed and forgiven". Many scholars class this Psalm as a penitential Psalm. All sin exacts a price on the sinner. In this Psalm we have described the price that the Psalmist, a believer, paid for his sin. We are not told specifically the nature of the sin, although many scholars believe it was in connection with King David's adultery with Bathsheba as recorded in 2 Samuel 11:1-12:23. The title of Psalm 51 very clearly refers to that sad and specific incident in David's life.

However, in the title of Psalm 32 we have the Hebrew word "*Maschil*" and this word can be translated to mean 'instruction', 'be wise', 'contemplate', 'to understand', etc. It would seem to imply that the Psalmist is seeking to be instructive, to help others to move forward when sin has snared one of God's children. The title of our radio talk, therefore, "Sins confessed and forgiven" forms an important part of the instruction given in this Psalm.

We will consider this Psalm in five sections. However, before moving into the first point it should be noted that the writers of Psalms sometimes are inspired to enter into a dialogue with God. This we will see as we progress through the Psalm. The five sections are as follows:

1. The normal standing and state of a believer (Psalm 32:1-2);
2. The distressing situation of unconfessed sin (Psalm 32:3-5);
3. The security of reconciliation (Psalm 32:6-7);
4. The instructed life (Psalm 32:8-10); and
5. The joy of the redeemed (Psalm 32:11).

1. The normal standing and state of a believer (Psalm 32:1-2)

What is meant by 'standing'? This is what a believer is eternally. It is based solely upon what our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished at Calvary. The moment a person truly accepts the Lord Jesus as Saviour, that person receives the forgiveness of sins, is guaranteed a place in heaven and will never come under the eternal judgement of God for sins. Such a person is often referred to in the New Testament as being "in Christ". Our standing before God is as someone who is 'in Christ'. Standing never changes in the eyes of God! As the hymn writer W. Yerbury states in his hymn:

*We joy in our God, and we sing of that love,
So sovereign and free, which did His heart move,
When lost our condition, all ruined, undone,
He saw with compassion, and spared not His Son.*

*His Son, His delight, His loved one He gave
The wrath to endure, by suffering to save;
Sure love so amazing, unmeasured, untold,
Since Him it hath given, no good will withhold.*

*We praise then our God; how rich is His grace!
We were far from Him once, estranged from His face.
By blood we are purchased, are cleansed and made nigh,
And blessed in His presence, in Jesus on high.*

By the word 'state' we mean our practical Christian life day by day. State will normally equate with standing but, if we sin, then what is normal is interrupted and the communion with the Lord and with God the Father is strained and hindered. This communion needs to be restored and this is achieved by seeking forgiveness for our failure. In 1 John 2:1, we read, "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." 1 John is well worth reading as it provides a lot of practical instruction for the Christian

life. In the 1 John 2:1 we find that *“Jesus Christ the righteous”* is not only the provider of our initial salvation but He is the Advocate, the one who acts on our behalf to restore the full fellowship and communion of the believer who has stumbled. Restoring starts when there is repentance and forgiveness is sought.

Let us read Psalm 32:1-2: *“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.”* A New Testament verse that might be seen as a parallel to the above would be Romans 8:1, *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”*

The Psalmist is saying that the person described in Psalm 32:1-2 is a happy person. All the failings of this person, variously described as transgression, sin, iniquity and deceit, have been dealt with to the satisfaction of the Lord. This person is in a happy standing and state before his God. So we have the Psalmist starting on a positive note and by implication presenting the condition to which the failed believer needs restoring. The Psalmist is putting down a marker and saying right at the commencement of this instructive Psalm, that this is where believers should be. In other words, follow these guidelines for a positive and happy restored spiritual condition.

2. The distressing situation of unconfessed sin (Psalm 32:3-5)

Let us read Psalm 32:3-5, *“When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah.”*

In Psalm 32:3-5 we have the condition of soul of a failed believer. At first it is possible to sin as a believer and fail to appreciate that this needs to be put right. At first, we may not realise that our fellowship and communion with God the Father and the Lord has been hindered. But Psalm 32:3-4 describe graphically the pain in the soul and conscience due to unconfessed sin. *“My bones grew old”* describe the ache in the soul, the inward pain, the restlessness of spirit, the feeling of being out of sorts with everyone and everything because of the loss of fellowship with God. Prayers may seem dull, only bouncing off the ceiling. When the restored believer looks back he or she can say *“For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me”* (Psalm 32:4). Lastly, the final symptom is described by the Psalmist: *“my vitality was turned into the drought of summer”* (Psalm 32:4). In other words, there was no fruit for God, strength was all gone, nothing going right with my words and actions appearing empty and useless.

Dear listener, can you identify with these symptoms? Does anything ring true? It is at that point the Psalmist inserts a *“Selah”*, a pause. We need to reflect, look back and ask ourselves the question, *“What is it? What has gone wrong?”* It is when we start looking for a reason that the Spirit of God will start His restorative work in our souls and bring us to Psalm 32:5. This verse is in two parts. First, *“I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD’”*. Here is the starting point of recovery. We need to acknowledge the failure, the sin that has broken communion. It is no good trying to hide anything from our God who is all seeing; nothing is hidden from Him (see Hebrews 4:13). Then there is the need to make confession. Confession to the Lord must be first. There may also be the need to seek forgiveness from a fellow believer if in our sin we have caused others pain. However, the Psalmist is primarily concerned with the restoration of communion with the Lord which must come first.

The second part of Psalm 32:5 states *“and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah.”* This is the wonderful thing about our God; He is always ready to forgive. Remember the parable of the prodigal son? (Luke 11:15-32). The Father was looking for his return (Luke 15:20). Once the prodigal is returning, his father moves to greet him and welcome him home (Luke 15:20). It is the same with our heavenly Father. When He sees the heart determined to repent, then the Father draws near to make the restoration easier. The Lord as the divine Advocate (1 John 2:1) comes in with the needed help, drawing near to the repentant, erring saint and assists in the process. Again the Psalmist puts in a *“Selah”*, a pause. How wonderful it is when fellowship is restored so that we just pause and consider the greatness of God who is so loving and gracious. The Lord wants His brethren back in the right relationship. The Father wants His children back in the atmosphere of heavenly love.

John in 1 John 1:3 states, *“That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”* John is describing what is normal to Christianity. 1 John is aimed at keeping believers in the condition of what is normal so that we might ever enjoy divine fellowship.

3. The security of reconciliation (Psalm 32:6-7)

Let us read Psalm 32:6-7, *“For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You in a time when You may be found; surely in a flood of great waters they shall not come near him. You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah.”*

The Psalmist is a person who knows his God. He takes the place of the godly because only the godly know their God as a God who is forgiving, merciful and full of compassion (see Psalm 145:8). Because of these wonderful characteristics there is confidence even in failure that the repentant saint will be restored into the full enjoyment of happy fellowship. The fellowship which has been missed, due to failure, has caused grief and misery in one's soul. The godly pray knowing that God forgives.

The next phrase, *"in a time when You may be found"* (Psalm 32:6), is based on two Hebrew words for 'time' and 'exist'. Time is connected to eternity and therefore gives the thought of the God who is always available at all time because He always exists. There is never a moment when God is not available. There is a parallel thought in Hebrews 13:8, *"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever."* God is always the same! As Christians find this consistency in relation to God now, so we will find it the same, more fully, in eternity in the Father's house.

Christians have a God who never changes in His disposition towards them, always ready to listen, to comfort, protect and guide. God works on the basis that Christians know what is stated in Romans 8:28, *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."* We have been brought into blessing and there is no change to that.

So when disasters loom large, the believer is not overwhelmed but knows that he has a refuge and will be preserved. We are surrounded with songs or a shout of deliverance (Psalm 32:7). This reminds me of Moses who, having passed through the Red Sea (Exodus 14:1-29), looked back and saw the enemy defeated, lying dead on the sea shore (Exodus 14:30). He then bursts into a song of victory, a song of deliverance (Exodus 15:1-8). In Psalm 40, as David contemplated his deliverance from the pit, he said, *"He has put a new song in my mouth - Praise to our God"* (Psalm 40:3). If David could sing, then so should Christians. T Kelly's song illustrates this:

*Awake each soul! Awake each tongue!
The subject is divine;
The Saviour's love demands our song;
Let all His people join.*

*This Saviour is the Mighty God,
The God of heaven above;
Revealed in flesh, He shed His blood,
Blest proof of endless love.*

*O Lord, Thy love exceeds our thought;
But this at least we see,
The soul that knows Thy love is taught
To value nought but Thee.*

*And though Thy love be faintly seen
What's seen demands our praise;
Without it, Lord, we still had been
Ensnared in Satan's ways.*

Then again the Psalmist gives another *"Selah"* (Psalm 32:7), a time to pause and consider the greatness and goodness of God. This world is running at a frightening pace. There is no time to simply stop, to think, relax and rest. Yet in the beginning, God gave the guidance, six days to work and one day to rest. We wonder why there is so much 'burn out', so much stress. It is simply because people have left God out of the equation of their lives! When God is not the central focus of our lives, then we are out of balance and, as a consequence, the world is out of balance. Let us be like the Psalmist and take a regular *"Selah"* (Psalm 32:4, 5, 7).

4. The instructed life (Psalm 32:8-10)

We now come to the section where a different person is speaking, through the Psalmist. It is the voice of God. Let us read these verses, *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he who trusts in the LORD, mercy shall surround him"* (Psalm 32:8-10).

We are not saved from our sins and given the assurance of heaven just to be abandoned by God and left to our own devices. No! First, God has given us of His Spirit to live in us (John 14:17). He is the Spirit of Truth to guide us (John 16:13). God has provided a wealth of information in the Scriptures that we might come to understand how to live and please God in this Satan dominated world. God's word is timeless; it is never out of date. How often we hear on the media that Christians need to change and adapt to the world's changing values, to modernise, to accept the way people

now want to live. Sadly, so many Christian groups seem to think that the Scriptures are now largely out of date, that God is now wrong and we need to embrace other ways of living, other religions and practices that God sees as abhorrent. There is a great need to stand up and be counted as someone who thinks that God is right in what He says in the Bible. Let us buck the trend, difficult though that might be, and take the criticism and persecution, but in so doing we will shine as lights in this dark world (see Philippians 2:15).

Psalm 32:9 tells us not to be like the horse and mule that have no understanding. These creatures need the bit and bridle for them to be effectively controlled in order to be useful creatures. In other words, the Psalmist tells us not to behave like animals that have no understanding, not to take on their characteristics. It is the wicked who behave like those who are unintelligent. To such sorrows will come. They are contrasted to the godly that trust in the Lord. God states that mercy will surround them. This reminds me of the last verse of Psalm 23, *“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever”* (Psalm 23:6). Our life might not be an easy one as a reading of Psalm 23 will show, but God goes with us through those difficulties and we know His kindness is ever towards us.

5. The joy of the redeemed (Psalm 32:11)

In Psalm 32:11 we return to the joy expressed in Psalm 32:1-2. *“Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous; and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!”* As we follow the instruction of this Psalm we deal with those sinful failures that come into our lives, for our God is a forgiving God. The happy believer of verse one is restored to the situation of Psalm 32:11.

“Be glad”, this reminds me of the ‘Pollyanna’ book which some may have read or indeed seen in film. It is about a young girl, whose mother died when she was very young; then not many years later her father dies. Life had not been easy; in fact, as a family they were poor. Her father had told her to play the ‘glad game’. In every situation, try to find something about which you can be glad. As mentioned earlier, the Scripture in Romans 8:28 tells us, *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”* But we do not need to wait until the difficulties arrive in order to be happy or glad. We should always be happy in the Lord who has brought us great blessings. We need to be a rejoicing people, not a people with sad faces. In Psalm 32:11, believers are described as righteous - righteous before a holy God, with no fear of condemnation (see Romans 8:1). Finally the Psalmist states at the end of Psalm 32:11, *“and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!”* It is not just shouting, it is shouting for joy! What is this joy connected with? Surely the joy of salvation! Salvation in all its fulness! A salvation which will be even better in glory! If you are right in heart, then you can show those feelings day by day as you live and work in a world that is full of people who have no real and lasting joy, often only sadness. What can change their sadness into joy? Only the wonderful Gospel message! This is a message of “a full and free salvation” that brings with it the forgiveness of sins.

To Conclude

What do we have in Psalm 32?

- Psalm 32:1-2 remind us that we are a happy and wonderfully blessed people;
- Psalm 32:3-4 give us the warning signs when, as Christians, we have sinned;
- Psalm 32:5 tells us what to do to get right again;
- Psalm 32:6-7 teach about our God who is accessible by prayer and is a help in troubling times;
- Psalm 32:8 is God’s promise to give wise instruction;
- Psalm 32:9 warns against being stubborn;
- Psalm 32:10 contrasts the believer and the wicked - people are only one or the other in God’s sight; and finally
- Psalm 32:11 returns to the condition of soul that should be normal for every Christian - that is being happy!

Just in closing, a verse from H Bonar’s hymn:

*Rejoice and be glad! The Redeemer has come:
Go, look on His cradle, His cross, and His tomb!
Sound His praises, tell the story of Him who was slain;
Sound His praises, tell with gladness He liveth again.*

May the Lord bless you today and thank you for listening.

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