

A Psalm of the Gospel

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Date: 22 January 2023

Preacher: Wilston Trin

[0 : 00] So why don't I pray as for God's guidance for us, and then we'll dive into the passage together. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, your word is light and life. Your word is able to make us wise in salvation.

And therefore, as we look to your word this morning, we ask and pray that by your spirit, help us to understand your word and to obey it in our lives.

Help me also to preach your word faithfully so that I may bring glory to you and edification to your people. In Jesus' name. Amen.

What brings you happiness the most in life? What brings you the most satisfaction in life? Now, I assume there are more than a hundred people here gathered in this hall this morning.

And if I were to ask you this question, what brings you happiness the most in life? I'll probably get dozens of different answers.

[1 : 13] Well, that's not surprising because different people have different opinions, different definitions of happiness and satisfaction, of joy.

Well, for some people, their happiness is tied to their possession. It's either their material possession, their wealth, their career, their success, or it's either their biological possession, their family, their health.

And it's incredible to see how many people in our world today, how they are trying their very best to do whatever they can to achieve this happiness, this satisfaction, this joy.

It is amazing, and sometimes it is unbelievable to see the extent that people would go to achieve this happiness.

In terms of health, for example, it is incredible to see how people have invested billions and billions into medical research, experiments, treatments, producing vaccines, and inventing medical equipment.

[2 : 28] All this is done with one single goal, which is to prolong life. And the assumption behind this is that happiness lies in a long life.

The quest for happiness for some people led them to be greedy. Some are even willing to commit crimes to get what they want. If you are a fan of crime documentaries like me, you won't be surprised to see how people are willing to cheat and even kill to achieve what they want.

They are willing to cheat and kill for an insurance claim. They are willing to cheat and kill for an inheritance. They are willing to cheat and kill because of jealousy. All is this done because of greed, and it's masked as the quest for happiness.

But is it true that happiness, true happiness that is, is it true that it is tied to material and biological? Are there enough for us to achieve true happiness? Are there what we need genuinely to achieve through satisfaction and experience the blessedness of this life?

[3 : 54] Well, King David thought otherwise. He didn't think health is through happiness, though he lived through his old age of 70 years old.

He didn't think his happiness is tied to his material possession, though he was incredibly wealthy. For King David, none of those things has any ultimate relevance when it comes to happiness in life. That's what he wrote here in Psalms 32. Psalm 32, the psalm that we're looking at this morning, is what the Bible scholars and theologians call the penitential psalm.

Penitential psalm. Where a confession of sin and remorse is the general feature of this particular psalm. And so here in Psalm 32, King David, by the power of the Holy Spirit, he lays out what he thinks brings true happiness in life.

And so the psalm begins with a statement of truth in verses 1 and 2. The psalmist says, Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

[5 : 18] Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them, in whose spirit is no deceit. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them, in whose sin the Lord does not count against them, in whose sin the Lord does not count against them.

That one is forgiven of their sins. What is sin? Well, sin is something that we think, something that we do, knowingly or unknowingly, that is against the will of God that he has revealed to us. And we know in the Bible, sin is what separates us from God. Sin leads us to bear the wrath of God. And because of sin, we deserve the eternal punishment in hell. But forgiven of sin means that the transgressor, the offender, will no longer have to bear the consequences of his own sins.

He has been set free from it. That is what the figures of speech about the sin being covered or the sin being concealed, and the Lord no longer counted against them here in this verse trying to convey.

[7 : 01] Perhaps, I think by this notion alone, there are some of you who might even think, there is no true justice here when the sins are only covered or concealed without actually being dealt with.

But I think that kind of thinking is mistaken because the Bible does tell us about the mechanism of forgiveness. The Bible does tell us about how God forgives sin.

The Apostle Paul in the New Testament, picking up from David's psalm here in Romans chapter 4, He further clarifies how we receive this forgiveness. That is, by faith in Jesus.

And not because we work for it. It's not because we deserve it. By having faith in Jesus, our sins are transferred to Jesus and are dealt with on the cross.

And as a result, Christ's righteousness is being imputed, being given, being credited to us. So much so that when God sees us, He sees Christ in us.

[8 : 17] And as if the fact that we are forgiven of our sins is not good news enough, which it is, but even better news is the mechanism of how this forgiveness works.

It is freely given to us by grace and we receive it only by faith in Jesus. It's free, yet it's costly.

It costs the life of Jesus. That's when justice is served on the cross. And this forgiveness that is given freely is not and should not lead us to sin more freely either.

We see here that the emphasis is not merely on sins forgiven, though it is that emphasis, but also in the emphasis here is also in the sincerity of the one seeking forgiveness.

The one who sincerely seeks for forgiveness will not want to commit the same offense again, again, and again. That's what David says here at the end of verse 2.

[9 : 32] He says, Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them, in whose spirit is no deceit. So friends, this is the great truth.

This truth teaches us that true happiness, true satisfaction, true joy is not found in whatever we own in this world, but in the fact that we are forgiven of our sins.

As if that is not good news enough, what's better is to know that our sins are forgiven not by an earthly magistrate, not by a royal pardon from Agong, but a forgiveness that comes from the Lord himself.

The King of kings, the Lord of lords, the one who creates the heavens and sustains the universe, his forgiveness is what matters the most.

And so the implication, the fact that we need forgiveness from God speaks of the severity of our sins. Because all sins that we committed is ultimately a sin against a holy God.

[10 : 49] When we sin against our neighbor, yes, our neighbor might be offended, but the ultimate offended party here is God himself because he reveals to us that we should love our neighbor as ourselves.

And King David, among other people, he knows about this because he experienced this the first hand. We know David sinned against Bathsheba by committing adultery with her.

We know David sinned against Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, by sending him to be killed in the battle to cover his own sin. Yet David, in his confession, after his sin was exposed, we read this in Psalm 51, verse 4, he says, Against you, which is God, against you and you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.

God. So David, out of all people, he knows exactly what it means to sin against a holy God.

That is why David also knows the ultimate happiness, ultimate joy, ultimate satisfaction is not found in everything else, but in the forgiveness of sin that comes from God alone.

[12 : 10] friends, true happiness is found only in knowing that we are forgiven people.

Is that your belief today? Is that a conviction that you hold in your life? I ask this question because I know the temptation for us, for you and I today, is to acknowledge this truth, yet to deny it by the way we live our lives.

We know that forgiveness of sin is what matters most in life, yet we go seeking other things, seeking satisfaction, seeking happiness in our career, in our family, in all the things that we own in this world.

As if like they are the most important things in life. But think about this for a moment. What is the point of having the best and highest education, but there's no forgiveness for our sins? what is the point of having the best career with the highest position, but we will still have to bear the consequences of our own sins?

[13 : 53] Think about that for a moment. what is the point of living a healthy and long life, yet there's no assurance of forgiveness of our sins.

True happiness is found in the fact that our sins are forgiven. David knows about this, not only as a fact, but he knows about this because he personally experienced this.

and so in verses 3 to 5, the psalmist, he moves from a statement of truth into telling his own personal testimony here. Now notice the first person singular pronouns used here in this section. He uses the words I, my, and me. Now he's telling his own story of trying to cover or trying to conceal his sin and let it go unconfessed, let it go unacknowledged before the Lord.

And what the psalmist experienced here is not good for him. And because he kept silent about his sin, and as a result, he says in verses 3 and 4, That's the picture of pressure, the picture of guilt that he felt due to his unconfessed sin before the Lord.

[15 : 32] Like I said, I'm a fan of crime documentaries. Now if you watch a lot of crime documentaries like me, I think I can confidently say this to you, with an exception of those who are truly wicked and evil, who committed the most atrocious crimes without the feelings of guilt and remorse, I think I can confidently tell you that most criminals are not like that.

Many of them, they still have the feelings of guilt and remorse for the things they have done, no matter how good they try to hide it. And so often, these feelings of guilt, these feelings of remorse, that lead them to confess their crimes to the authorities.

I mean, even if they could avoid the consequences of their crimes for a while, but try to imagine, imagine the guilt, imagine the shame, imagine the pressure of having to live your life in fear, in fear of getting exposed, in fear of being punished because of your crime.

Imagine having to go on a hike and avoid the authorities for the rest of your life. It changes your life forever, isn't it? Not for the better, but for the worse.

There's no rest, there's no peace. And that same feeling is what the psalmist David here is experiencing when he tries to hide his crime, not from the authorities, not from the police, but from God.

[17 : 19] That is what he's trying to convey with the figures of speech using the words like groaning, like heavy, and my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

That's the kind of pressure that he's experiencing. And notice also here how he describes his own crime against the Lord.

In verse 5 he says he calls it iniquity, he calls it transgressions, and he calls it sin.

sin. There's no attempt whatsoever here to downplay the seriousness of his crimes. He calls it for what it is.

No attempts whatsoever to give excuses for his own sins. Now I think in our world today, if we look into our world today, there's a lot of attempts to downplay the seriousness of sin by calling it something else.

[18 : 25] we call it a mistake. We call it a weakness. But by calling it something else other than what it truly is, that is sin, actually we deceive ourselves in trying to make ourselves feel good.

But God is not mocked. It is only when we acknowledge and confess our sins as it is before the holy God that we are able to experience his forgiveness.

That's what the psalmist experienced here when he says in verse 5 again, 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 forgive the guilt of my sin.

Now that word confess there is truly an important word for us. It comes from a Hebrew word yada, which can also be translated as to admit or to acknowledge.

So instead of trying to conceal, instead of concealing, covering his sin, to confess is to expose it out in the open, to lay it bare. To confess means to humble ourselves and to admit our wrong.

[19 : 59] And I suspect that's why many of us struggle to confess our sins. We find it difficult to confess our sins simply because humility, humbleness does not come to us naturally.

Sometimes God is more willing to forgive than us coming to God confessing our sins. Sometimes we need to learn the hard way before we are willing to admit our wrong.

That certainly is the case for David who wrote this psalm. He had a humbling experience when the Lord used the prophet Nathan to expose his sin of adultery and murder with Bathsheba and the murder of her wife, her husband Uriah in 2 Samuel chapter 12.

He had to bear the consequences of his own sins and one of the consequences is the death of his own child. And I pray today that God will never have to use this drastic measure to humble us in order for us to come to him.

So it takes great humility to confess our sins to God. This is not an empty confession devoid of the change of heart, something that we say we can wake out, we can wake out.

[21 : 34] Because again, coming back to verse 2, this confession includes the sincerity of heart. And the Lord honors those who sincerely confess their sins and seek his forgiveness.

forgiveness. So the end of verse 5, the psalmist says, and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

That, my friend, is the heart of God for sinners like you and me. He is ever ready to forgive.

forgive. In fact, he is delighted to forgive. He is happy to forgive. We don't have to continue the way we are, burdened by our sin, guilt, and shame.

There is forgiveness available for us if we confess our sins to God. The psalmist David's experience here, this experience can be ours too.

[22 : 53] And it is natural for someone who had tested the forgiveness, the goodness, the graciousness of God would want to share it with others. Someone who has tested something so good, have seen something that is so beautiful, would want to share it with others.

Some years ago, I was on my personal quest to find the best kolomi in Kuching. I went to a lot of kopitiam and food courts all around Kuching, not all of them, but most of them.

But let me tell you confidently here, or at least this is my personal opinion, nothing beats the ball of kolomi from a kopitiam called Oriental Park, somewhere near Brook Dock Yard.

Kolomi is sweet, the Chasiu has a vivid smoky taste, just the way I like it. And since discovering this particular kopitiam, which is quite secluded to be honest, it has been my favourite place to have a bowl of kolomi.

And I've been introducing this place to friends and family ever since. Now if you don't know where that place is, that's okay, come and belanja me, I'll bring you there.

[24 : 13] And that's what the psalmist is doing here in the rest of the psalm from verse 6 onwards. He had tested the goodness of God in forgiving his sin and so now he exhorts others, he encourages others to come and seek forgiveness from the Lord as well.

He says in verse 6, therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found. That's an exhortation, that's an encouragement for us.

But as much as this is an exhortation, there's a sense of warning here as well. There's a sense of urgency here. They are called to seek the Lord's forgiveness while he may be found.

found. And the implication here is that there will be a time when the Lord cannot be found anymore. That's the implication from this verse.

And so while he may be found now, so it requires our swift action to grab that opportunity to come and seek forgiveness from the Lord while he still be able to be found.

[25 : 33] But notice also, this exhortation, this encouragement is directed towards the faithful. The faithful. And so often in the Old Testament, the faithful is referred to a person who is devout, who is pious, who is righteous.

And when the faithful is used corporately, it refers to the faithful followers of Yahweh in the Old Testament. But the fact that the faithful here is used in the context of the confession of sin, that implies that the faithful, the righteous here, is also not without sin.

And so these people, and to these people, that God is ever ready to extend his forgiveness when they come to him. sin. And so I take this exhortation as directed to a specific group of people, though it is certainly legitimate for us to read this psalm as a general call to all people to confess their sins to God as well.

And again, we see the effect of coming to God for forgiveness here. There's a picture of calm, there's a picture of safety. When the psalmist says in the second half of verse 6, he says, surely the rising waters will not reach them.

You are my hiding place, you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. Well, of course, this doesn't mean that those who come to God to seek for forgiveness will never have trouble at all.

[27 : 19] Just like what the prosperity preachers would like you to believe. But that is not the case here. But what he is saying here is that the ultimate trouble, that is sin, this has been dealt with when we come to God.

And so we will no longer have to bear the ultimate punishment. And that's the kind of safety that the psalmist is pointing to here. And I also like the play of words here.

Earlier, the psalmist talks about hiding his own sin from God and here in this section, he talks about God being his hiding place as a result of his confession of sin.

Isn't that beautiful? When we don't hide our sins before God, he becomes our hiding place, a place of safety, a place of calm.

God's love. And not only that, we then receive guidance from the Lord as his way of taking care of us.

[28 : 32] That's the promise we see here in verse 8. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.

That's God's way of showing his love, showing his care, and he wants to be intimate with those who come to him.

And so for the rest of the psalm, the psalmist turns once again giving an exhortation in verses 9 to 11. This particular section, it gives a challenge to us not to be like a horse or a mule that needs to be dragged before we come to God.

It's a picture of coming to God voluntarily with sincerity. It's a challenge for us not to choose the foolish way of hiding our sin before God and let it go unconfessed, unacknowledged.

It is a challenge not to reject God's offer of forgiveness. forgiveness. The wicked will choose not only to remain in their sin but also to choose to bear the punishment of their own sin.

[29 : 54] But the unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in God as verse 10 tells us. And so it is a perfect reason for us to rejoice in the Lord.

Friends, I think in a gathering as big as this today, I suspect that there are some of you who have not experienced God's forgiveness for whatever reason.

it might be that because you don't think of yourself as an offender, as a criminal who offends the God of the universe and therefore you don't think you need forgiveness.

Or perhaps you acknowledge that you are a sinner, an offender, a criminal before God but you simply don't have the humility to come to God and confess your sin to Him.

If that is you today, can I plead for you to come to God in humility, confessing your sin to Him?

[31 : 17] You don't have to live in sin, you don't have to live in guilt, you don't have to live in shame anymore, you don't have to live in the fear of punishment anymore.

That's the beauty of the gospel, isn't it? That God in His Son, Jesus Christ, came to save us from our sin by taking the punishment upon Himself on the cross.

He rose again to be the King and now is calling everyone to repent and to confess of their sin and to trust Him as Lord, as a Savior, as dear Savior.

And forgiveness can be yours today if you confess your sin and trust in Jesus. Now for those of you who have already experienced the forgiveness of God, who have trusted in Jesus, continue to abide in Him.

Be assured of His love for you today. Be assured of His guidance for you today. Be assured that your greatest problem, the problem of sin and the punishment that comes with it, that has been dealt with once and for all.

[32 : 42] Well, that does not mean that you will not fall into sin anymore, but when you do, when we do, we can always come to God through Jesus to ask for forgiveness.

That's the beauty of the gospel, isn't it? And God delights, He loves, He is happy in forgiving His children who come to Him.

So friends, again let me emphasize this, this is the beauty of the gospel. The worst of sinners can be forgiven.

Let's pray. heavenly Father, we thank you that in your goodness, in your love, that you have sent your son Jesus to die for us, to bear the punishment that we deserve.

God and now He rose again and He's calling everyone to repent of their sin and to trust in Him. If there's anyone of us here today who have not experienced the forgiveness of God through Jesus, we ask and pray that by your spirit to touch their hearts that they will humbly come to you through Jesus by trusting in Jesus and confessing of their sin.

[34 : 21] for those of us who have trusted Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we ask and pray that you continue to preserve us until the day you take us away from this world or until the day that Christ comes again.

In Jesus' name we give thanks and pray. Amen.