

Psalm 32

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[0 : 0 0] Are you happy? Some of you are thinking, I don't come to church to be asked that question. But what's the answer?

I imagine in that two or three seconds of pregnant pause you were given an opportunity to think about that and to give a mental answer to that question. Of course, people can respond to that question in different ways.

Some will respond in a very spontaneous way. Their heart will tell them the answer to the question. If any of you here this morning, and I'm sure many of you are, I shouldn't doubt that it's the case.

If any of you are in love this morning, then I'm sure the answer to the question is a no-brainer. You're very happy and more power to you if that is so.

I'm included, of course, in that group of those who are in love if anybody was in doubt on that matter. Or maybe in the past few weeks, some of you got that envelope that confirmed that you had the results that you needed to go to college or university and do the course that you really wanted to do.

[1 : 1 0] And as you opened that envelope and saw the results, you were very happy with what you saw and with what you had achieved. And perhaps others were less happy. That's the way it goes.

Maybe your favorite team scores a last-minute winner to secure promotion or avoid relegation. And people are very happy when that happens.

And many of you will know that I have probably what borders on an unhealthy interest in football. And in this weekend, there have been many important games that determine qualification or otherwise to the World Cup.

Sadly, this is all irrelevant to Scotland on this occasion. But you see the pictures of the teams who achieved that, longed for qualification.

They're ecstatically happy. The players and the manager and the supporters. It's just a picture of happiness as you witnessed that.

[2 : 1 6] Now, others, in answer to the question, are you happy, are maybe a bit more analytical. Maybe some will think, well, define happiness before I can possibly answer that question.

Fair enough. And that's not an easy matter. If we were to maybe ask a hundred people at random here in Aberdeen for them to give a definition, I imagine we would have a very wide range of answers to the question, well, what is happiness?

There have been no shortage of suggestions. When I was a lad, which wasn't yesterday, there was an advert on the TV that some of you of my generation will remember, which, tongue-in-cheek, I hope, and I presume, assured us that happiness is a cigar called Hamlet.

Well, if only it were that easy. Now, any number of other suggestions have been made, from the trivial to the transcendent.

The Bible, in presenting what it means to be happy, combines the aspect of definition, of describing, if you wish, happiness, but combines it with the experience of happiness.

[3 : 40] Concretely, it is the one who has experienced happiness who then describes, and so defines it, for others who will listen. And this is what David does in Psalm 32 that we'll be considering this morning.

And let's read the psalm. And we are going to consider the whole psalm. Now, given that there is so much in the psalm, that necessarily will involve a great deal of selection.

However, in order to get the force of the whole psalm, on this occasion, I opted for attempting, in any case, to consider the whole message of the psalm.

So, let's read the whole psalm before proceeding to consider what it says, what David tells us in that psalm concerning happiness. Psalm 32, and we'll read the whole of the psalm.

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 there is no deceit.

[4 : 55] 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.

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.

Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to you 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. 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 which have no understanding, but must be controlled by bit and bridle, or they will not come to you. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in Him.

[5 : 57] Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous. Sing, all you who are upright in heart. The Word of God. Now, as we've read the psalm, we haven't come across the word happy or happiness in that form.

However, the psalm begins in this way, blessed is He. And another legitimate way of translating that particular expression would be happy is He or all the happiness of Him whose transgressions are forgiven.

We sometimes are reluctant to use the word happy in this context or as an alternative for blessed because it can have the impression or it gives us the feel of being a bit superficial.

The word happy and blessed seems a heavier, more significant word. Blessed as a word has its advantages in that it does very clearly pinpoint that the source of this blessing or happiness is God.

God is the one who blesses us in this fashion. And happy maybe doesn't immediately identify God as the source. But I want to stick with the word happy or happiness because I feel that the problem isn't with the intrinsic meaning of the word happy but the manner in which that meaning has perhaps been devolved in a trivial use of the word.

[7 : 37] But that's not the word's fault that we sometimes use it in a more trivial way. So for our purposes this morning as we consider this matter of happiness and of being happy and what is involved in being happy I'm going to stick with that word.

The psalmist who writes this psalm David who writes this psalm has discovered he has experienced what true happiness involves and he wants to share that knowledge he wants to share that experience with others.

What is it that David would have you know this morning? What is it that he wants you to understand concerning this matter?

Well we can say this he wants you to know what the problem was that denied him true happiness. He has discovered happiness he has experienced it having been in a very different place he has come to the point where he can testify I am a happy man and he wants us to know what it was that had prevented him from being there what the problem had been that had not allowed him to be happy.

So first of all we have in the psalm or the first thing we're going to consider it's not considered actually in this order in David's presentation is the problem described. But David not only wants to explain to us what the problem was that prevented him from being truly happy he also wants you to know the answer he discovered that allowed him to experience true happiness.

[9 : 20] What was it that changed things for him? How is it that he came to enjoy blessedness and happiness in his life and experience?

Well he gives us the answer to that question. But then also David wants to extend to you this morning an invitation in the light of what he describes in the light of the problem that he recognizes was part of his own life and that held him back from knowing and experiencing blessedness or happiness and very particularly in the light of coming to that knowledge and experience of being blessed by God of coming to that place of enjoying happiness.

He wants to extend an invitation to you and to me. Well first of all then the problem described and the problem really is described in verses 3 and 4 of the psalm and the problem is presented in the words that begin verse 3 of the psalm.

The verse begins in this way when I kept silent when I kept silent and then he goes on to describe the consequences of keeping 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.

Perhaps much could be said concerning those consequences but I don't want to focus on that in any detail but simply to notice that David identifies his problem as keeping silent.

[11 : 06] This was the problem that he had to confront. Now that immediately I would hope produce a question for us well what did he keep silent about?

Well that is clear in the psalm before us his silence was concerning his sin. His silence was his failure to confess his sin.

This was his problem. He was silent concerning his sin. Now that produces or generates another question that perhaps I don't know in other days wouldn't have been necessary to delve into a great deal but today even the word sin produces a question well what is that?

It's not a word that we use in our everyday conversation. Well the psalm is helpful in illustrating to us and informing us concerning the nature of sin what is sin and in the first two verses three different words are used for sin and they have overlapping meanings but aren't strictly synonyms and we can just notice what they are to help us to inform us somewhat as to what this matter is this matter of sin that David was silent concerning and which constituted the great problem the great obstacle for him to experiencing a true happiness.

Let's notice then in the first two verses we read blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven. transgression now that particular word carries in it the idea of rebellion to rebel against an authority and this is sin to rebel against the authority of God as God would direct us in the manner in which we should live and we rebel against that authority and we transgress his norms.

[13 : 20] so sin is transgression. Then the verse continues and it uses the word that we are using as the generic word whose transgressions are forgiven whose sins are covered and the second word that we have in verse one as I say it overlaps with the first and the one that follows but here there is the idea of going astray or we might say missing the mark so it's not simply the bad that we do but the good that we fail to do not living the life that God would have us live we're reminded of the words of the catechism in answer to this question that we're considering what is sin and we're told that it's any lack of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God so it's not simply a transgression of the law but a lack of conformity to of not doing that which we should do that also in God's sight constitutes sin so we have transgression the idea of rebelling against God's authority of not recognizing his authority in our lives the idea of going astray or missing the mark but then we have a third word which in the version that we have before us is simply the same word used but it is a different word in the original blessed is the man in verse 2 whose sin the Lord does not count against him other versions use the word iniquity to distinguish and to reflect that in the original language different word is used and this word iniquity carries in it the idea of twisting the truth so we have these different aspects that inform us and help us to have a clearer picture of what sin is this problem that David was keeping silent concerning and with all the resulting consequences in his life his transgression of God's law his falling short of God's demands his twisting of God's truth to satisfy his own desires and his failure to recognize and confess these things constituted for him the obstacle to happiness or blessedness in his own life indeed as we have read in verses 3 and 4 in the experience of David the consequences go beyond the absence of happiness he describes the state he was in as he kept silent now it's probably important to stress that here

David is describing his own personal experience he is honestly describing how he felt it isn't necessarily the case that we will all experience the same thing we may be guilty of keeping silent you may be guilty of not confessing your sin and perhaps aren't experiencing what David experienced it doesn't make your problem any lesser you might say that the experience of David was helpful in prodding him in encouraging him to do something about his sin however we're not going to dwell much on that matter so the problem is described it is his sin and his failure to confess his silence on the matter but there is another word in verse 2 that I just want to pinpoint and it is a very important one in discussing or considering the problem that David faced and it's the word deceit in verse 2 having already made mention of transgressions and sins and iniquities admittedly in the context of them having been forgiven but in using these words identifying the problem that he had he also goes on to say that he has blessed the one in whose spirit is no deceit and deceit is another part if you wish of the problem but I wouldn't think of it as being just the fourth word on the list transgression sin iniquity and well here is another word deceit another word that kind of gives us an idea of what the problem was it is not really the fourth word on a list rather this word describes

David's attitude to the other three the deceit that was in his heart led him to try and pretend that all was well it encouraged him this deceit that was in his heart to very foolishly attempt to deceive God concerning his condition to deceive others as to the life he was living and indeed to deceive himself so he was guilty of transgression he was guilty of rebellion against God he was guilty of missing the mark of not living in the manner that God intended he was guilty of twisting God's truth to his own preferences but the problem is perpetuated by the fact that he is deceitful concerning these things he likes to think that that is not so he wants to persuade God and others that he is alright that he's okay that this was at the heart of his problem is illustrated or further illustrated when he himself in the psalm on coming to the point of confession describes his previous attempt to deceive as covering up his iniquity there in verse 5 then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity he recognizes that until that point or up to that point this had been the problem he had been covering up his iniquity he had been attempting to deceive himself and others and indeed

God concerning his condition so there is a sense in which this deceit in his heart is the problem he needs to attack there is little he can do about his transgression and sin and iniquity while he continues to practice this deceit well David describes his condition he describes the problem that he had but this is the same problem that I have it's the same problem that you have it's the same problem that we all have we are sinners we rebel against God we do not live up to the standards that God lays down for us we twist the truth to favor us and to fit in with our own preferences but we do all of these things and then we like to pretend that that is not the case that that isn't a problem that we are not guilty in all of these ways and so deceit in our own heart constitutes the problem that we need to deal with we deceive ourselves in many and manifold ways we question the possibility of rebellion as we would deny maybe the very existence of God or certainly his authority over our lives how can we be rebels if God has no authority over us we minimize the gravity of our sin we persuade ourselves that we are at heart pretty good people we're not that bad we're quite nice and of course all of these things are the problem that we have in failing to recognize our condition in failing to recognize our problem in deceiving ourselves concerning who we are and where we are in fact we are now so clever and this is perhaps going beyond an individual's attempt to deceive in this matter but as a society we are so clever that we practically remove from our discourse and conversation the very words that define our problem sin iniquity transgression these are all words that today sound very antiquated very old fashioned for our sophisticated and self righteous age when was the last time you heard any of these words words that are at the very heart of the human condition words that are at the very heart of who we are when was the last time you heard these words in conversation when was the last time you heard them on a news report as being relevant in any way to what was being presented we don't hear these words we deceive ourselves into thinking that they're not an issue that they're not a problem that they're not relevant to our problem we ask people what are the problems facing society and they'll tell us about the economy and global warming and a whole series a whole list and these are genuine problems indeed if we had time we could explore them and discover that these matters sin and iniquity and transgression have a great deal to do with these other problems but we ignore the main thing we deceive ourselves and if there is deceit in our heart then we will remain silent for we will not even be conscious of a need to confess so we have the problem described we deceive we deceive ourselves but then

David also would have us know praise God that there is an answer that he discovered he who had transgressed he who had sinned he who had been guilty of iniquity he who had kept silent he who had deceived himself but the time came when he discovered the answer to his problem and the answer that he presents can be presented or explained in terms of what David himself does in the light of his condition but also and very importantly in what God does first of all what does David do well the first matter concerning what David does is this issue of deceit he comes face to face with his deceit he no longer continues in this charade of pretending everything is okay we read what he does there in verse 5 then I acknowledged my sin to you

[24 : 14] I acknowledged my sin to you no longer pretending I was okay no longer pretending there wasn't a problem no I acknowledged my sin to you and this is a monumental step for David here are we might call them the birth pangs of happiness that he would acknowledge his condition that he would acknowledge his sin happy is the man who recognizes that he is not righteous Augustine said something similar he said the beginning of knowledge is to know yourself a sinner and we might paraphrase that and say the beginning of happiness is to know yourself a sinner the beginning of blessedness is to recognize to know yourself a sinner he no longer attempts to cover up his iniquity this is what he must do what about you are you deceiving yourself do you live your life day by day and week by week and month by month without considering these matters of your transgression of your sin of your iniquity do you remain silent on these things do you deceive yourself that all is well when all is not well but of course it's not enough for David to recognize and to acknowledge his sin he must confess it if the problem was his keeping silent and when he does recognize and acknowledge his sin he must no longer be silent he must speak he must confess and he resolves to confess his sin there we read in verse 5

I said the language of resolution I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord there is self-examination in David there is an honesty in recognizing and describing his condition there is a resolve to do something about it and there is confession of sin to God he confesses to the one against whom he had rebelled I will confess my transgressions to the Lord this is what David must do this is what you must do this is what I must do this is what we all must do and what does God do what does God do as David recognizes and confesses his sin well David tells us there in verse 5 I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and you forgave the guilt of my sin you forgave verses 1 and 2 which we've been commenting on in the context simply of the language it uses to describe sin describes for us in beautiful and rich language the manner and nature of God's forgiving and we'll turn to that in a very brief moment but notice firstly the immediacy of God's forgiveness as it's presented by

David in verse 5 I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and you forgave the guilt of my sin again Augustine helps us in painting the picture in very memorable language he says the following concerning this testimony of David the word is scarcely in his mouth the word of confession the word is scarcely in his mouth before the wound is healed the confession and the forgiveness are simultaneous and that this is for us and for you friend a beautiful reminder of God's disposition to forgive of his willingness to forgive he is the one who we are told delights in mercy he is not reluctant in forgiving he is not reluctant in pardoning he is the one who runs to meet and embrace the prodigal but returning son I will confess my transgressions to the

Lord and you forgave the guilt of my sin this is something that God is willing to do he is willing to do it now he is willing to do it this morning for you in your life if you will but sincerely acknowledge your sin and confess your sin he will forgive you and he will do so now let's just turn very briefly to the manner in which this forgiveness of God is described in the first two verses of the psalm blessed is he all the happiness blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven whose sins are covered there is a contrast there between the foolishness of David in attempting to cover his sins as he himself describes it there in verse five that he had been covering his iniquity he had been trying to hide his iniquity and

God's response to David as he confesses his sin is to cover his sins but not in the sense of hiding them or just simply removing them from view but of removing them altogether from his consideration from God's consideration they are covered and then he goes on blessed is the man whose sin whose iniquity the Lord does not count against him such a man is blessed such a man is happy whose sins have been forgiven now this psalm is used by Paul in Romans chapter 4 in his presentation and his argument concerning the justification of a sinner being by faith alone we read earlier in the service the passage in question or certainly part of the passage in question and there in Romans chapter 3 and 4 Paul is teaching and explaining that justification is by faith alone and not by works and in presenting this argument he very wisely turns to the

[30 : 34] Old Testament to give foundation to his argument he knows very well that those who are listening will want to hear that this is not some novel truth that he is bringing but a truth that is grounded in the scriptures and so he turns very particularly to Abraham and explains how Abraham was justified not by works but by faith Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness but then he also makes use of this psalm to substantiate or to build up his case or his argument and very particularly the beginning of the psalm which he quotes there in Romans chapter 4 blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him now this isn't the occasion and time does not allow us to delve into Paul's argument in any detail but perhaps we could say a couple of things that Paul's use of the psalm helps us to better understand one thing that

Paul does is to enrich and develop the idea of sin not being counted against the sinner in the psalm David if you wish limits himself to this truth that this sin that he was guilty of is no longer counted against him he is no longer guilty he is not guilty but Paul in making reference to this psalm makes it very clear that this involves not simply sin being covered or sin being removed but righteousness being granted to the sinner in the place of sin as sin is no longer accounted against the sinner but rather the righteousness of Christ is counted for him and placed to his account but of course Paul also in making reference to this psalm answers for us what we might call the great unanswered question of the forgiveness that is so beautifully described and experienced by David as he presents this to us in this psalm the great question that we would ask if we only had the psalm to go on well how can this be how can it be that this God who is just this God who is holy how can it be that he can freely forgive how can it be that he can see can so gratuitously as it were simply cover sin and say it's okay it doesn't matter anymore it's all sorted how can it be

David experiences the forgiveness he enjoys the experience but this is the great question how can it be that God would do such a thing how can he do such a thing and of course that is something that we are given the answer to in Paul's presentation as he would bring into the picture the person of Jesus Christ and what he has done that has made possible that our sins be forgiven that has made possible yes even that his righteousness be credited to our account and we could maybe just read and we will simply have to limit ourselves to reading without more commentary what Paul says in that regard in Romans chapter 3 and verse 22 this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe there is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus God presented him presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood he did this to demonstrate his justice because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus how is it that God can so freely forgive how is it that when you but confess your sins you are able to enjoy full and free forgiveness it is because what Jesus has done he died in your place in Calvary's tree he took upon himself the punishment of your sin the punishment has been paid the wrath of God has been satisfied and so because of what Jesus has done it is possible for sin to be freely pardoned it is possible for as it is described at the very moment of your sincere confession at that very moment for you to enjoy and experience full forgiveness so there is the answer discovered by David to his problem and the answer is that he would acknowledge his sin that he would confess his sin and as he so does

God will respond granting him this full and free forgiveness but finally and briefly the psalm also extends to us an invitation and really the second half of the psalm constitutes if you wish an invitation or certainly includes an invitation and we'll simply focus in on one very specific element of that this invitation that David would extend to you that David extends to me also this morning is expressed very beautifully and I think quite memorably by John Calvin in his commentary on this psalm he puts it in these terms he says that David invites others to fellowship with him in his happiness isn't that a beautiful expression David invites others he invites you to fellowship with him in his happiness to fellowship in his happiness he invites others to enjoy the fruit of sincere confession of sin

David has known what it was to be under the heavy hand of God he has known what it is to have been in the dark valley of being silent and of refusing stubbornly to confess his sin but he has discovered the fresh daylight of forgiveness he has discovered the gracious hand of God upon him as he has been forgiven of his sins and he would others experience that same forgiveness he would that others would enjoy that same forgiveness he knows that there is forgiveness available for all it is not in short supply all who would but confess as he had confessed will experience what he has experienced and so he invites others there in verse 6 therefore in the light of what I have presented to you in the light of what I have experienced in the light of what I have discovered I would say to you let everyone who is godly pray to you let everyone who recognizes his condition confess his sin that is the invitation that is extended to you come to the one who is willing and able to forgive you

[37 : 49] I have told this story before and so I seek your understanding if you have heard it already but even though I have told it not only here but on other occasions as I tell it I still find it very helpful and so I will repeat the story that helps illustrate the forgiveness of God and the ready availability of it for all and reinforces this invitation that David is making to you this morning that you would but come and confess and enjoy and experience and the story is of the wee boy who went to the seaside for the first time he lived far from the coast and this was the first occasion he was going to go to the seaside he'd heard about the sea he'd heard about the seaside but he'd never been before and he was going with his classmates from school and it was a big crowd and they were all very excited and happy it was a big outing but this wee boy was concerned his face revealed a concern and it wasn't very clear why he was concerned why he wasn't joining in in the excitement of all the others but there he was sitting in his seat just with a look of concern on his face and well it was a long journey but eventually they arrived at the seaside and everybody was coming out of the bus and this wee boy as he came out of the bus and he saw the sea in front of him he saw the ocean in front of him and the words that he expressed were these enough for everybody you see his concern had been that he thought the sea was some glorified swimming pool and he said there's all these children and I'm just a wee boy and there won't be enough room for me

I won't enjoy it because I won't get in there first and then he sees the sea and well there's enough for everybody and of course the ocean can you imagine somebody saying there's no room for me in the ocean of course there's room for everybody and so it is with God's forgiveness there's enough for everybody there's enough for you whatever your iniquity whatever your transgression however long you have been silent however stubborn you have been there is forgiveness for you there is enough for everybody if you would but come and confess your sin you will be forgiven what will you do will you confess or will you be stubborn like the horse or the mule who have no understanding will you delay in confessing there are words of warning in that regard also we read there in verse 6 therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found today is a day of opportunity we don't know if that opportunity will remain for you tomorrow cry out to him confess your sin while he may be found while he may hear and answer your cry so here is an invitation extended to us all that we too would experience and know and enjoy true happiness 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 there is no deceit that we would all know and experience this blessedness as we come to god confessing our sins let us pray let us pray