

Psalm 32:1-6

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[0 : 0 0] Are you happy? If not, you better shape up, because Christmas is one month away, exactly.

And you've got to be happy at Christmas. It's traditional. I recently saw a review online of a book entitled *How to Be Happy*. It's a very naff title for a book, and at the time I didn't give it much importance. But I returned to it because I was intrigued just to hear or discover a little bit more about it. And in order to discover it, because I wasn't really very sure where I'd first seen it, I went into Amazon and under books just typed in *How to Be Happy*. And to my astonishment, there are a huge number of books with that title or a very similar title, *How to Be Happy*. It would seem that there is a big market out there for any advice going on happiness and how to get it and presumably how to keep it. The Bible is big on happiness. I'm not saying for a moment that the Bible is some kind of self-help manual or a snappy five easy steps to happiness program. But I do insist that the Bible, and the author of the Bible, even more importantly God, is big on happiness. God wants you to be happy. He made you to be happy. And God provides the means and the resources that place happiness within your reach. Listen to what David says in the Psalm that we have already read at the very beginning of Psalm 32, O the happiness of the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Happy is the man whose iniquity the Lord does not count against him.

Now, some of you are saying, well, hold on a minute. In my Bible, it doesn't say happy. It says blessed. And indeed, that is the word that's used in our version of the Bible. And of course, the word blessed seems a more sober word, a more religious word in its flavor. And it is, or certainly has that feel of being a more sober word. And really, for that reason, the word happy is arguably a better translation for the Hebrew word that David uses here. Blessed is the man, happy is the man whose transgressions are forgiven. The happiness that David has in mind is not a frothy, jingle bells happiness that is here today and gone tomorrow, but a deep, grounded, and enduring happiness for all seasons. Happy, blessed, is the man, the woman whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

My goal this morning is maybe an unrealistically ambitious one in that what I want to do is present a sweeping survey of this whole psalm from the perspective of what it says about happiness.

And we'll do this in the following way. First of all, we'll notice happiness described. In verses 1 and 2, happiness described. But then in verses 3 and 4, we find somberly happiness lost. But then in verse 5, we find happiness found. And then in verse 6, and then jumping to verses 8 through 11, we have what I'm calling happiness shared. So, happiness described, happiness lost, happiness found, and happiness shared. And we're going to leave verse 7, the verse that we were very fleetingly commenting on with the children, verse 7, we'll leave that for this evening, and we'll consider it by itself almost this evening. You are my hiding place. Now, we do need to, before we move on to consider the psalm under the headings that I've already indicated, I do need to clarify what is a very important point as we embark on this. And that is to remind you and to highlight that the psalm is the testimony of a believer who, having tasted the happiness that God grants to his own, then experiences the loss of, but also the subsequent recovery of God's happiness, of the happiness that

[4 : 55] God grants. So, this is a believer. He had experienced in his life the happiness that he describes and speaks of, but then he lost that happiness. He lost it certainly in the experience of it, but then he recovers it. And having recovered it, he wants to share the rediscovery of God's happiness with others. And it's important to note that it is a believer who is describing his experience.

And as such, the lessons to be learned from this psalm are particularly applicable to believers, and very especially in this matter of the loss of happiness and the recovery of happiness, a very particular application for believers. But of course, the truths that this psalm considers and deals with concerning man's need and man's condition and God's forgiveness are big themes that are applicable and important and of urgent importance to all, regardless of whether we are or are not as yet believers in Jesus Christ. So, let's consider the psalm under the headings that we've already indicated. And first of all, verses 1 and 2, we have what we are calling happiness described.

The first two verses are really beatitudes. They are under what we normally call wisdom literature, that genre of literature that we find in the Psalms and in the Proverbs and elsewhere.

Beatitudes, blessed is the one, happy is the one. And in these beatitudes that the psalm begins with, I want us to notice two elements that come under this heading of happiness described. And the two elements that I think we can find in these opening verses are these. First of all, there is what I'm calling the recognition of need and then also the experience of forgiveness. The recognition of need and the experience of forgiveness. We're thinking of happiness described, and happiness is described in these verses. And these two elements are present. First of all, the recognition of need. In verses 1 and 2, there are four statements, the fourth of which differs from the others. Let's just read through them. Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven. First statement. Blessed is he whose sins are covered. It's the second statement. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him.

It's the third statement. And then we have, by implication, blessed is he in whose spirit is no deceit. Now, there's a slight shift in what is being said. The first three statements, which we'll come to in a moment, describe what God does. But the fourth statement describes a feature or characteristic of the happy man. In such a man, in such a woman, there is no deceit, in whose spirit is no deceit.

[8 : 17] Now, what's going on here? What is being said by David? You see, at first sight, as we read this, we might be discouraged, because it might appear that what is being presented is an unreachable, unattainable condition for happiness. You see, if David is saying that for you to be happy, it is necessary that in your spirit there be no deceit, then you might say, well, woe is me, because my heart, like the heart of all men, is full of deceit. So, what hope is there for me to experience the happiness that the psalmist speaks of? Is this, then, some unreachable, some unattainable, some utopic condition that we can't possibly meet? Those in whose spirit is no deceit. Well, that is not what the psalmist is saying. Rather, what David is saying in the context of the psalm and in the context even of this opening, a salvo, if you wish, these first beatitudes, what David is saying is that the happy man is the man who recognizes that he is a sinner, who acknowledges that he falls short, who does not deceitfully contend that all is well with his soul and life.

See, this is the implication, or this is the idea of David when he says, in whose spirit there is no deceit in this regard. He doesn't claim to be something that he is not. He doesn't claim to be all right when he is not all right. He doesn't claim to be a good and perfect man when actually he knows and acknowledges that he is a sinner. The man in whose spirit is deceit lives in denial of his own transgressions and sins and iniquity. But the woman in whose spirit is no deceit puts her hand up and acknowledges it's a fair cop. I am a sinner. I do fall short. I am a rebel before God. So, that's really the idea there in the end of verse 2. And it comes under this heading or subheading that I'm suggesting, the recognition of need, to recognize our need of forgiveness. Recognition of sin, recognition of guilt, of the need for forgiveness is integral to happiness. So, before moving on,

I would ask you the question, is it in you this recognition of need? Do you recognize that you are a sinner in need of forgiveness? But the second element in this description of happiness that the psalm begins with is what we're calling the experience of forgiveness. The happy man is the man who has experienced what the Beatitudes describe. Transgressions forgiven, sin covered, sin not counted against him. And what can we say about this forgiveness described? Well, I would say two things about this forgiveness described in the first two verses of the psalm. And the two things that I would say are these, that it is full and it is free. Full forgiveness and free forgiveness. Thinking, first of all, of forgiveness as full, the purpose of the threefold description of forgiveness that we find there in verses 1 and 2 is to emphasize that God's forgiveness is full and all-encompassing.

Three words are used in the original Hebrew for sin. First of all, we have the word transgressions there in verse 1, and this word implies willful rebellion, willful knowing rebellion against God, transgression.

But then we have a second word there in English translated as sins, whose sins are covered. And that word has the meaning of missing the mark. So, it's not so much the idea of willful rebellion, but of perhaps somebody who genuinely is trying to live a good life, but misses the mark. Something that we all do. We maybe endeavor to do the right thing, but often we don't, even though it's our desire to do so.

[12 : 34] Or maybe our desire to do so. We miss the mark. And then there is a third word, though in our translation it's simply the same English word sin that is used there in verse 2. It's actually a different word, which has the idea of twisting the truth, something that we're all very experts at. You know, to avoid the implications of God's commands, we wriggle and squirm and twist the truth to our convenience.

We are all very adept at doing that. The point is this, that whatever it is that we are guilty of, whether it is this willful rebellion against God, whether it is missing the mark, whether it's twisting God's truth to our convenience, whatever the nature or characteristic of our sin, it is covered by God. It is covered by God's forgiveness. Whoever you are, whatever you have done, forgiveness that is full is available to you and adequate for you.

If you are the younger brother in the parable of the prodigal son who was guilty of scandalous sin as he blew his inheritance on prostitutes, or whether you are the goody-two-shoes, older brother, guilty of the respectable sins of pride and self-sufficiency, forgiveness that is full and all-encompassing is offered to you by God. So, this experience of forgiveness described at the beginning of the psalm is first of all full, but it's also free. And here I'm particularly noting the language of the third statement in the opening two verses, where we read there, Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him. Now, what does this mean? Well, we are given a deeper insight into what it means by reference to the manner in which the Apostle Paul makes use of this psalm in the passage that we read in Romans chapter 4. And we can just turn quickly to that passage now, as that helps us better understand what it is that the psalmist is saying there in the psalm. In Romans chapter 4, and we'll read again from verse 3, what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Now, when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work, but trusts God, who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works. And then we have the quote from the beginning of Psalm 32. What is Paul teaching in these verses in his letter to the Romans? Well, what he's teaching fundamentally is that salvation, if you wish, is freely given by God. It's freely given by God. It's not something that can be earned or merited, as a laborer would merit his wages. It is a gift of God to be received by faith. But in addition, Paul is saying that for the one who believes, for the one who has faith in God and in

God's provision for him, for the one who believes the righteousness of Jesus Christ is credited to his or her account. And he substantiates this remarkable affirmation by appealing to Psalm 32, and particularly to the language of reckoning or counting for or against used in verse 2 of the Psalm.

David's focus in the Psalm, David's focus is on one side of the coin in this matter of reckoning or counting, namely, that God does not count against the sinner his sin. Paul in Romans focuses on the other side of the coin, namely, that what God does do is reckon or count for the sinner the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

[16 : 56] And so, in this very remarkable way, we have presented to us so powerfully and so eloquently that forgiveness not only is full, but it is free. There's nothing we can do to earn it or pay for it or deserve it, freely given by our gracious God. And so, in these first two verses, happiness described.

What are the elements? Well, there is this recognition of need that is necessary, but also, of course, alongside it, the experience of forgiveness, a forgiveness that is full and free.

But the psalm continues, and it continues rather somberly to consider and to describe, the psalmist describes the experience of happiness lost. Happiness lost. Notice there in verse 3, 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. David clearly here is looking back to an experience that he has come through, but it was such an intense experience that he is still able to describe it in such vivid terms. Happiness lost. And as we think of happiness lost, I think there are three questions to consider. First of all, when does this happen? When does this happen? What does it look like? And who is involved? First of all then, when does this happen? Well, we're told David very clearly answers that question in verse 3. When I kept silent. When I kept silent, these were the sorry consequences. Now, what's the problem with silence? Well, of course, the problem is not with silence per se. It is the problem of keeping silent about our sin. Very evidently, this is what David is referring to. This is the problem, keeping silent before God, a Godward silence in regard to our sin.

The silence is the consequence of the deceit referred to in verse 2. There in verse 2, of course, David is speaking of the man in whose spirit there is no deceit. But for the man in whose spirit there is deceit, that deceit will be accompanied by silence. This Godward silence. No intention, no desire, no urgency, no urgency to confess sin before God. When I kept silent. That is what we do as believers.

We keep silent. We cover up our sin. We insist on our innocence. We resist the nudges of God's Spirit. We keep silence. No repentance, no confession, and no forgiveness.

[19 : 56] When is happiness lost? When we keep silent. But what does this loss of happiness look like? Well, David describes it for us. My bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. My strength was sapped as in the heat of a summer. Now, let's be clear here. This is the honest testimony of David as he relates his own personal experience. It is not the case that the unrepentant silence of a believer will always result in such an intense and devastating experience as described by David. We are all different. That said, these are symptoms of happiness lost that we do do well to take note of.

And what are the symptoms? Well, the description that we have describes emotional and spiritual anguish and dissatisfaction. My groaning all day long, it describes a man in whom there is a loss of vitality and desire. My strength was sapped. Now, that might reveal itself in a tiredness, in a lack of interest, in spiritual matters, in the service of God. Everything is such an effort. We know that we should do this or that, but it's just such an effort. There isn't that desire, that vitality, that energy, that enthusiasm, that passion that perhaps we had previously known and experienced.

We can look back and say, oh, yes, it was different before, but that's not me today. That's what it looks like. Even physical weakness. My bones wasted away. Now, of course, we're not for a moment saying that physical weakness is always the result of a Godward silence, but here it's described as one possible symptom or consequence of such a spiritual predicament. What does happiness lost look like? Well, here are some of the symptoms that David describes for us, and the bottom line is that for the Christian, unconfessed sin does and will of necessity rob us of our happiness in the Lord.

Silence and singing just don't go together. The silence of shame and the singing of praise cannot coexist. When is this happiness lost? When we keep silent? What does it look like? Well, here is something that describes what it might look like. But who is involved? Who is involved? We might say, well, is this not a very personal matter that only involves the silent sufferer? Is this not a matter of spiritual cause and effect involving no third parties? The believer is silent, and as a consequence, the believer suffers, the believer suffers, period. But of course, others are involved. Those around us suffer. Of what blessing to others will a believer in David's condition be? Can you imagine David when he was wasting away, when he was groaning all day long? Can you imagine that here was a man who was a blessing to those around him? Clearly, that would not, could not have been the case. So others are affected. But more significantly for our purposes this morning, and stated explicitly in the psalm, we have clearly indicated that God is involved. We're asking, who is involved? And what David very clearly identifies for us is that God is involved. David testifies, your hand was heavy upon me.

It is God who is instrumental in graciously bringing David to this sorry and dark place. The hand that lifts up, the hand that consoles, the hand that wipes away our tears is also a hand that lies heavily upon the unrepentant believer. Where we once delighted in the presence of God, now there is only a sense of dread, or perhaps even worse, dullness. God becomes an unwelcome and awkward presence in our lives. We would prefer if He would just keep His distance, but rather His hand lies heavily upon us. And if that is your experience, thank God that it is, because far worse is for you not to be conscious of His hand, if this is your condition. Suffering and guilty of a Godward silence.

[24 : 41] Happiness lost. But the psalm continues, thank God, and describes for us happiness found, happiness rediscovered. In verse 5, then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Happiness found.

This also involves two elements, or two that we want to notice. There is confession made, and there is forgiveness granted. What does David do? Well, there we read, I said, I will confess.

I will confess. This confession of David is, we might call it, considered and comprehensive. It's considered in the sense that this is clearly the outcome of reflection on the part of David.

I said, I will confess. I acknowledged my condition. I realized that the dark place I am in, and realized that there is no reason for me to be here, for there is a God willing to forgive me. And so, I considered these matters, and I concluded, I said, I will confess. Of course, the parallel in the New Testament is so striking of the prodigal son in his misery, and he considers his miserable condition, and he decides, I'm going back to the Father. What am I doing here? I'm going back to the Father.

And so, here, the psalmist, I said, I will confess. Considered confession, but comprehensive confession. We notice in verses 1 and 2 that the comprehensive description of sin, well, the confession of David is also comprehensive. I acknowledged my sin to you. I did not cover up my iniquity. You forgave the guilt of my sin. The very words that we find at the beginning of the psalm repeated and echoed in David's confession. So, happiness found involves confession made, but of course, it also involves forgiveness granted. And the forgiveness granted is also comprehensive. It's also considered. God's forgiveness that He grants to those who confess is a considered forgiveness. Now, not in the sense of the time that it takes to forgive. Far from it.

[27 : 08] Listen to what Augustine says about this very psalm. The Word is scarcely in His mouth before the wound is healed. So, when we speak of God's forgiveness as being considered, we're not speaking about the time it takes, but considered rather in the sense of the grounds upon which God forgives. Because God forgives on the grounds of His own faithfulness and justice. Now, we don't have time to develop or consider this, but we would do well if only to read what we find in 1 John 1 and verses 8 and 9.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins—and notice here how John gives us the grounds upon which God forgives—if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. What? Strange grounds. The justice and the faithfulness of God. What's just about forgiving a sinner? Well, it's just because Jesus has died in the place of sinners. And if Jesus has taken our punishment, it would be an injustice to place that punishment also on the repentant sinner.

It's faithful because God has promised to forgive the repentant sinner. And so, on these grounds, God considers our case. And as we come and confess before Him, He grants us His considered forgiveness.

And, of course, also comprehensive. We've already considered that, and we don't need to dwell on it much in the first part of the psalm. But notice what David says especially there at the end of verse 5, You forgave the guilt of my sin. God forgives our sin, but He also crucially deals with the guilt of our sin.

Now, we might think the two are almost the same thing. They certainly go hand in hand, sin and guilt. And, of course, they are intricately connected, but we do need to distinguish between them, between sin and guilt. Let me illustrate that with a rather foolish activity that I've been engaging myself in in these past couple of weeks. And that is I've started to play five-a-side football again after many years. Now, I don't know if that's a reflection of a poor man's midlife crisis. You see, a rich man buys a Porsche, but a poor man plays five-a-side football. Well, I don't know if that's the reason, but I've been playing five-a-side football these last couple of weeks. Now, imagine this scenario, that as the young players who surround me and humiliate me with their skills and their greater stamina do so just time and time again, and this old man just begins to really get irritated by his inability to play the game as, I won't say as he once did, because that would be rather deceitful, but as he once imagines that he did. And imagine if a red mist came down on your minister, and one of these young guys who was just being intolerably good at the game, and I just couldn't handle it, and I sent him a punch and knocked him down. It's a horrendous scenario, of course, but just imagine that happened. Now, of course, once that had happened, I would think, oh, what have I done? You know, I was, ah, why did I do that? And I would immediately go to the young man.

[30 : 36] I won't put a name on the young man, but I'll go to him and say, I'm sorry, I'm really sorry. I don't know why I did that. Now, I hope, I'm pretty confident that in those circumstances, the young man, whoever he is, would say, that's okay, okay, I forgive you. And I would be grateful for his forgiveness. The young man is able to forgive me. But I ask you the question, am I still guilty of what I did? Well, of course I am. I'm still guilty of that act of violence. I'm still guilty of that foolish act of violently assaulting this young boy. You see, the young boy can forgive me, but I'm still guilty. I am guilty, and that young man, he can't deal with my guilt. He can forgive me, and I would be grateful for it. But guilt is something only God can deal with. God deals with guilt. And you see, guilt is our big problem before God. Guilt is what constitutes the major obstacle to friendship with God and to happiness, the happiness that He desires and has designed us for. Only God can deal with your guilt. And He does so not simply by declaring you innocent, but by making you innocent, crediting to your account the righteousness of Jesus Christ, as you with Abraham and with all the saints through the ages believe and trust in God and in His provision for you. This is the path to recovered happiness. I will confess. I will confess. Happiness described, happiness lost, happiness found or recovered, but finally, happiness shared. There in verse 6, therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you. Clearly,

David, having rediscovered the forgiveness of God and having experienced once again the blessedness and the happiness that God brings as He forgives the repentant sinner, His great desire is to share this discovery with others. Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to you. He can do no other than encourage and urge others to do the same. He urges all to offer prayer to God, to do so with urgency, to do so now. He urges others to enjoy the benefits of such prayer and supplication.

Everyone who is godly, may they pray to you while you may be found. Surely then, when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach Him. And He continues to exhort others there in verses 8 to 11. There's some debate as to who is speaking there in verse 8, whether it's God speaking to David or David speaking to the congregation. And I tend to go with the second possibility. And if that's the case, then this is David continuing to encourage others to experience the happiness that he is experiencing, to take the steps that are necessary to be reconciled to God. Happiness shared. You see, this desire of David to share what he has discovered is not a spontaneous but short-lived burst of enthusiasm, but a serious determination. Then in verse 8, I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. This implies effort and perseverance on the part of the psalmist to instruct and to help others in the way that they should go. And there are echoes here, aren't they, of

David's testimony in Psalm 51, where again he speaks of the forgiveness that he has enjoyed and the immediate consequences of that. In Psalm 51 and in verse 13, we read, in the beginning of the psalm, of course, the description of what God has done for him. And then what do we read?

Or as he foresees this circumstance, then I will teach transgressors your way, and sinners will turn back to you. In the light of what you do for me, I will then teach others and urge others and encourage others. Well, as we draw things to a close, let me address those of you this morning who are Christians, who have put your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. But perhaps it is your experience today that you are lying under the heavy hand of God. Perhaps it is true of you today that you are guilty of unconfessed sin. Perhaps it is your experience that you have drifted, maybe almost imperceptibly from your first love. And so, with the psalmist, I would urge you to return to the Lord.

[35 : 38] Why would you delay? Why would you hesitate to take the words of the psalm? Don't be like the horse or the mule who have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. Don't be like the Lord. Come back. Return to the Lord. But perhaps this morning, you as yet have not placed your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. And I would urge you to come to the same determination that David came to. I will confess. I will confess. Yes, he came to that determination as a believer, but it is to that same determination that all must come. I will confess my transgressions to the Lord. That's what I'll do. Maybe you say, well, I don't know what will happen. I'm not sure if God will do anything. Well, you confess and just see what God does. I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you will discover what the psalmist discovered, and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

If you confess, God will, as he did with David, forgive the guilt of your sin and put a new song in your mouth. I don't know how many of you have tapped your feet to the proclaimers, I'm on the road from misery to happiness today, and I'll spare you the ahas at the end of that particular line. But I don't know if you've heard that song or enjoyed that song as it's been sung so many times. But what is the road? What is the road that can take you to that much sought-after destination? I'm on the road from misery to happiness today? What is that road? What are those steps to happiness? Well, it's just the one. I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.

Let us pray.