

ECF 25th November 2018 Psalm 32 Don't Try To Hide

In January of this year Brian Hawkins walked into a TV station in Redding, California and asked to speak to a reporter. On camera, Brian said that he was on his way to the Police Station to confess to the murder of 19 year old Frank McAlister 25 years previously.

The police had investigated this crime, but had not been able to uncover what had happened. But although he had got away with the crime, Brian said that the past 25 years had been horrible. "I've been through hell my whole life because of this... Every minute of every day has been a nightmare," he said.

Finally, he said that he could no longer live with the guilt, and so he decided to come forward and face the crime that he had tried to hide for 25 years.

In Psalm 32, David wrote about a similar kind of experience. We don't know what he had done wrong at this time, but in this psalm he expressed the weight of unconfessed sin in his life, and the blessing that he experienced when he finally confessed that sin to God. And so throughout this psalm, David encouraged us not to try to hide from God.

Psalm 32: "Blessed is he
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.

² Blessed is the man
whose sin the Lord does not count against him
and in whose spirit is no deceit.

³ When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

⁴ For day and night
your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was sapped
as in the heat of summer.

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.

⁶ 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.

⁷ You are my hiding-place;
you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of deliverance.

⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you and watch over you.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ Many are the woes of the wicked,
but the Lord's unfailing love
surrounds the man who trusts in him.

¹¹ Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous;
sing, all you who are upright in heart!"

1. When we hide our sins

In this psalm David looked back at a time, he said, "When I kept silent." Psalm 32:3. This was a time when he refused to confess his wrongdoing and instead he tried, as he said, "to cover up my iniquity." Psalm 32:5

Some people think this relates to the time when he committed adultery with a married woman called Bathsheba and then

murdered her husband to cover up the resulting pregnancy. For a whole year David tried to cover up his sin, until finally he was confronted by the prophet Nathan.

However, there is no indication in the psalm that this is the situation he was thinking about. All he does is use three biblical words to describe his wrong. In v5, he described it as

- “My iniquity,” Psalm 32:5, which is about straying from God’s path,
- “My sin,” Psalm 32:5, which is about falling short of God’s standard,
- “My transgressions,” Psalm 32:5, which is about rebelling against God’s authority.

But whatever the situation was, I think we can all understand David’s desire to hide his iniquity, sin and transgressions. It is such an instinctive response to when we do wrong.

It is what Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. When God called out to him, Adam replied: “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” Genesis 3:10 Then they tried to hide by blaming each other and the serpent.

In Jesus’ day, the group of people who were most guilty of this were the Pharisees. Most people would have described them as good people. And yet, Jesus saw through their religious respectability, and saw them trying to hide from the reality of their sin. He said to them: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. ²⁸ In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.” Matthew 23:27–28

And we can be guilty of that very same kind of attitude. We so dislike the shame and guilt that comes with admitting our wrong, that we will do anything that we can to hide from it:

- We try to cover up the evidence for our sin, hoping that this will prevent anyone from being able to convict us.
- We try to dodge our responsibility, by blaming other people, our parents, our upbringing or our society for what we’ve done.
- We try to minimize our guilt by making excuses for our actions and attitudes.
- We might try to deny our guilt by calling what is evil, good and what is good, evil.
- We might viciously attack others who have been found out for the very same sins, in an effort to deflect attention from our shortcomings.
- We might try to hide behind a mask of respectability, looking the part of someone whose life is upright and decent.

And so today, we could come to church trying to hide our sinfulness, dodging our responsibility, minimizing our guilt, hiding behind an exterior of looking the part. And really, nobody else would know. Nobody, apart from God.

a) They will be revealed

David tried to hide his sin, but he couldn’t hide it from God. And as a result, David’s guilt was revealed in the pain of unconfessed sin. He vividly described the impact this had on him.

He said, “my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.” Psalm 32:3 Bones describe his whole physical structure. And so to say that his bones were wasting away, was to say that his whole body was worn out. That was because of his never ending groaning, the deep unspoken cry of anguish in his heart.

And this completely drained David’s energy: “My strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.” Psalm 32:4 Like a man walking in the desert, with the sun beating down on his head and his mouth completely dry, David was shattered and exhausted.

And this was not just the impact of David’s own guilty conscience. This was the work of God in his life: “For day and night your hand was heavy upon me.” Psalm 32:4 God was working severely on him – reminding him of his faults, weighing him down with his guilt, convicting him of his sin.

And God continues to do this in the world today. It is one of the vital ministries of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said about him, “When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.” John 16:8 And the experience of this can be overwhelming and exhausting. We can experience this in our mind, our emotions and even in our bodies.

But God does not do this out of hatred or bitterness. Hebrews 12:6, quotes from the book of Proverbs, to encourage us that “The Lord disciplines those he loves.”

The disciplining hand of God is an expression of love. He loves us too much to leave us to happily remain in our sin. He knows that the consequence of unconfessed sin is too great. He doesn't want us to remain hidden in our sin until the day of judgement. And so in love, he puts his hand upon us and reveals the depth of our sinfulness, so that we will turn to him for forgiveness.

God did not put his hand on David because he hated David. Instead, this was because he loved him, and desperately wanted him to come out of hiding, into the open, so that he could experience the blessing of forgiveness.

2. When we reveal our sins

And this is what David finally did:

**"Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.**

I said, "I will confess

my transgressions to the Lord." Psalm 32:5

Instead of trying to hide his sin, David comprehensively revealed it to God. He admitted that he had fallen short of God's standard. He stopped trying to cover up his straying from God's will. And he owned up to his rebellion against God's authority.

From trying to hide in the dark to conceal his wrongdoing from God, he stepped out into the light of God's presence and confessed his sin to God.

a) They will be hidden

And the amazing result of this was, that David's sins were completely hidden. Psalm 32:5: **"And you forgave the guilt of my sin."**

When David tried to hide his sin, God responded by putting his heavy hand upon him to reveal his guilt. But when David revealed his sin, God responded by taking that guilt and lifting it completely from him.

David was burdened when he tried to conceal his sin. But he was blessed when he confessed it. And it is with this blessing that he started his psalm: **"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered."** Psalm 32:1

We've already seen that the psalms describe the blessing, the deep and lasting joy, of those who are in right relationship with God:

- Psalm 1 described the blessing of those who reject the way of this world: **"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers."** Psalm 1:1
- Psalm 2 described the blessing of those who accept the Messiah as their king: **"Blessed are all who take refuge in him."** Psalm 2:12
- And Psalm 24 described the blessing of those who come to the Lord in holiness: **"He will receive blessing from the Lord."** Psalm 24:5

But this blessing is not for good people, who think that they have lived a good life and have earned God's favour. That's because apart from Jesus, **"There is no-one righteous, not even one."** Romans 3:10

Instead this blessing is for guilty, rotten sinners who have come to God for his gift of outrageous grace. When Paul quoted from Psalm 32, he said that David **"speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works."** Romans 4:6. This is the blessing of the gospel of grace.

Those who receive it, are credited with righteousness apart from what they have done. Their sin is removed from their record – they are those **"whose sin the Lord does not count against him."** Psalm 32:2 And instead, God imputes righteousness - God declares them to be righteous in his sight.

And so this blessing is for those **"in whose spirit is no deceit."** Psalm 32:2. It is for those who who come honestly, openly and humbly before a Holy God, admitting the depth of their sin and the weight of their guilt, and repenting of their rebellion. If they do this, then they can be freely and fully declared righteous in God's sight.

i) By the Blood of Jesus

But how is this possible? How can God be just and at the same time justify the guilty? How can a Holy God forgive sinners? Well the answer is here in v1 where David says, **"Blessed is he... whose sins are covered."** Psalm 32:1

The Mosaic Law provided a picture of this in the sacrificial system. In it an animal would become the sinner's substitute and die in their place. The blood of the animal would provide atonement which means it would cover over that person's debt before God and reconcile them to God.

But of course, this animal sacrifice couldn't really cover over someone's guilt. Hebrews 10:4 says: "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." The weight of our sin was too great for any animal to carry.

And so these Old Testament sacrifices were a shadow, pointing forward to Jesus, the ultimate sacrifice that would cover over our sin. And so John wrote: "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." 1 John 2:2

He came to be our substitute. On the cross, our sin was placed on him, and he died in our place. And his precious blood covered over our sin. His sacrifice paid our debt. And that is why John can write: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:8-9

So when we try to hide our sins, God will reveal them. But when we confess our sins to God, then our sins will be covered by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. As Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy."

3. Come to Christ

So what should be our response to all of this? What should we do in light of David's experience here? Well, David gives us three therefores.

First of all, we need to come to Jesus. "Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found." Psalm 32:6 This offer of forgiveness will not be available forever. God's grace will not be offered indefinitely. One day it will be too late, and all that will remain is God's judgement.

But today is the day of salvation. And so if we haven't already, then we need to come humbly to him today, admitting our sinfulness and asking for his forgiveness. And this prayer of repentance and faith will lead to salvation as God's promise is that "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13

a) Our Hiding Place

And so if we come to Jesus, then we can rest in his salvation, even when the day of judgement comes:

"Surely when the mighty waters rise,
they will not reach him.

⁷You are my hiding-place;
you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of deliverance." Psalm 32:6-7

This is the amazing gift that Jesus wants to give to us. When we try to protect ourselves by hiding our sin, then we will ultimately have to face God's judgement. But if we come to Christ and confess our sin, then he will be our hiding place, our refuge, our place of eternal safety. "For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." Colossians 3:3

4. Follow Christ

But forgiveness is not the end of what Jesus wants to do in our lives. He doesn't forgive us so that we can just go on our way and live for ourselves. Instead a prayer for forgiveness should lead to a life of obedience.

So David warns: "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." Psalm 32:9

Jesus doesn't want us to stubbornly demand our own way, unless he forces his will upon us. Instead Jesus wants us to live in eager submission to his plan and purpose for our lives.

a) Our Counsellor

And if we submit to his leadership in our lives, then his promise is:

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;

I will counsel you and watch over you.” Psalm 32:8

If we allow Jesus to be in charge of our lives, then he will be our ultimate counsellor, training, teaching and guiding us in the way of life, watching over us in love. He will walk with us through our lives, helping us to increasingly step into the transformed life of a child of God, helping us to become more and more like Jesus.

5. Rejoice in Christ

And so thirdly, instead of the anxiety, groaning, weakness and exhaustion of those who try to hide their guilt before God, we can rejoice in the salvation of our Lord. That’s why this psalm ends with a declaration of praise:

“Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous;
sing, all you who are upright in heart!” Psalm 32:11

If we have experienced this, then no matter what else is happening in our lives, we have reasons for rejoicing. We are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Our transgressions are forgiven, our sins have been covered, our iniquity will never be reckoned against us.

a) Our Loving Saviour

This is the blessing of those who come to Jesus compared with those who hide from him:

“Many are the woes of the wicked,
but the Lord’s unfailing love
surrounds the man who trusts in him.” Psalm 32:10

Conclusions

If we try to hide our sins from God, then sooner or later, they will be revealed and we will be judged for them.

But if we reveal our sins to God and come to Jesus for salvation, then

- Our sins will be covered by his precious blood of Jesus
- And we can be hidden in Christ,
- And counselled by Christ
- And surrounded by the unfailing love of Christ.

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