



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for the First Sunday in Lent
February 26, 2023

Blessèd Is the Man

Psalm 32:1–7

¹ Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ² Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. ³ For 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 dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah ⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah ⁶ Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him. ⁷ You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance. Selah

God's definitions are not our definitions, are they? How do we typically define blessedness? Nice house – maybe a pool in the back yard? – good income – the closer we can come to six figures, the better, eh? – newer model car – maybe something exotic? Or how about more personal blessings like a faithful spouse, loving children, dedicated friends?

I couldn't really argue with any of those things. But God defines blessedness differently. A few weeks ago, when we looked at Psalm 112, we heard God say that a man blessed by God is one who fears the Lord, who understands that he has a loving Father in heaven who wants what's best for him and is committed to helping him toward that end. Today, in Psalm 32, God says through His servant David that one who is blessed is one whose transgression is forgiven and whose sin is covered.

David begins by explaining this in the negative – what does a person's life look like when he does *not* have this forgiveness before God? He says, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long." But, what does he mean when he says that he kept silent?

In verse 2 he says: "Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and *in whose spirit there is no deceit.*" What sort of deceitfulness is he referring to here? It's deceitfulness concerning his iniquity. In other words, he's not telling the truth about his sins. Who's he lying to? Himself and God.

And what is this deceitfulness doing to him? "My bones wasted away through my groaning all day long," he says. His whole being is suffering clear to the bone because he's been lying to himself and God about his sin. Outwardly, he's silent, but inwardly, at the core of his being, he is in turmoil. He is wasting away from the inside out.

This was God's doing. You see, for his own good, God's hand was heavy upon him.



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Was it merely an afflicted conscience? Or was there a physical manifestation? Or both? Clearly, his guilt has overwhelmed him and he is suffering. “My vigor,” it says in the Hebrew, “was dried up like a summer drought.” It’s a little hard to imagine now, because the grass is buried under half a foot snow, but in the Spring, when the snow has melted and the temperatures begin to rise, that grass will become green and plush, a thick carpet under our feet. But then, by about August, it’ll turn brown and crunchy. And, for all appearances, it’ll look dead. That’s what David says his strength has turned into: brown, dead, dry grass.

That’s what relationships can be like when repentance is left unspoken. It’s miserable. David draws us into his own personal misery, misery that craves forgiveness, but never begins the conversation that can elicit such forgiveness because it never acknowledges its sin.

What happens, though, when he finally opens up, admits his sin – to himself, to God, and to whomever he’s sinned against – and repents, asking for forgiveness?

Tim Saleska, who wrote the wonderful volume on the Psalms for the Concordia Commentary Series, has a beautiful description of how forgiveness works and the life changing, world shaking impact it has on those who experience it. He writes:

“How blessed is the one forgiven of transgression, the one absolved of sin’ (32:1) is a truth that I have come to know by experience. When I have a fight with my wife,” he says, “the icy silence between us is tangible. I can’t eat. I can’t sleep. My stomach churns. In spite of my stubbornness, I am forced to admit that I have to make things right: ‘I’ve really messed up. Please forgive me . . .’ ‘I forgive you,’ she says. Every time I ask, she forgives me. Imagine that! Her words and her gentle touch restore me. They are lifegiving. I know what it is to exclaim with my whole heart: ‘How blessed is one whose sin is forgiven.’ I have come to know: forgiveness is a most glorious thing.”

Indeed it is! If you’ve had a similar experience to that of Dr. Saleska – and I pray you have – then you know the joy of forgiveness in your interpersonal relationships.

But what about how this works in our relationship with God? First of all, you have to believe you’re in a relationship with God before this even comes up. If you don’t, if you’re fairly confident that you can live just fine without believing in an omnipotent God, and if you feel certain that your “spirit” or “soul” – which you may not even believe you have – is not in jeopardy because of any so-called sin, you will not resonate with, or even understand, the anxiety David feels in this Psalm, nor his joy at knowing God’s forgiveness.

You can only comprehend this if you understand that you are in a relationship with God and you fear that you may have ruined that relationship. You become afraid that God is irreparably angry with you. How you get to that point is somewhat of a mystery, because it’s not something that someone goes in search of. You don’t wake up one day of your own accord and think, “Gee, I wonder if I’ve ticked God off for good.” That’s not an idea



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that you can grab; that idea has to grab you. It's an experience that has to come from outside of you. In other words, God has to do that work for you. He comes to you through His Means of Grace – His Word and Sacraments – and confronts you in such a way that you can no longer lie to yourself or to Him. This, of course, is the work of the Holy Spirit, who reveals the truth to us that, despite all pretensions, we are really helpless, sinful creatures, subject to the Almighty God. Once we understand that, we'll understand that feeling of desperation that is suddenly turned on its head when God's forgiveness is revealed to you.

"And You – You forgave the iniquity of my sin," David says, doubling his address to God, as though he can scarcely believe God has been so gracious toward him. Have you ever been so overwhelmed by God's love, mercy, and grace toward you that you could hardly believe it? Oh, I hope so! I pray it's something you know and experience again and again.

But, how do you know it? How did David know that God had forgiven him? God sent His prophet to David to confront him with his sin, to elicit his repentance, and then to proclaim his forgiveness. "God has put away your sin," the prophet said, "you will not die" (2 Samuel 12:13).

So relieved was David at this proclamation of forgiveness, that he enjoins everyone to follow his example and call upon the Lord to be forgiven for their transgressions too. "Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found," he says. But what time is he referring to? What is this time when God may be found?

God had promised that He would be present in the sanctuary, and it was there that His people received and were constantly assured of His favor. In the sanctuary, surrounded by God's people with their cries of "deliverance," and in the context of the priests offering sacrifices for atonement, David heard God's Word of promise through the means God had established to give him the very certainty which now brought him overwhelming comfort.

So, how can we know the same comfort David knew? We follow his example and listen to his advice: Offer prayer to God at a time when He may be found. Our certainty, beloved, is the same as David's; it's a gift of the Holy Spirit which comes through the Word of promise and through the Sacraments of grace we receive.

In the days of Psalm 32, God spoke to His people through His mighty acts of deliverance, through the blessing of the priests, the word of the prophets, and through the atoning sacrifices at the sanctuary. Now He's given us the Word of His Son. The Gospel is God's Word of promise that, in Christ, all our sins are forgiven – all *your* sins are forgiven. God's Word is just as true in our day, beloved, as it was in David's day, so we, too, can be certain that His promise still holds true.

When we doubt or despair, it's through this Word that the Spirit offers us comfort, showing us what it is to be truly blessed. You are blessed, beloved, because your transgressions are forgiven, your sins are covered by the righteousness of Christ. Cling



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to this truth by meeting God where He has promised to be found: In His holy Church, in His Word and Sacraments, surrounded by His people, that confessing your sins, you, too, may find comfort in your hiding place: our gracious Savior, Jesus Christ, our Deliverer. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen