

Psalm 32 : Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Psalm 32, A Maskell of David I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

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. You are a hiding place for me. You preserve me from trouble.

You surround me with shouts of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.

Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

Psalm 32 is a psalm of thanksgiving and testimony. It recounts the penitence of the worshipper and the restoration of the Lord. It gives praise to the Lord for what he has done, and presents the worshipper's example to others as an encouragement for them to humble themselves and to trust in the Lord.

[1 : 4 0] Some have imagined this psalm coming from the period after David's confession of his sins concerning Bathsheba and Uriah. It begins with two beatitudes, statements of the blessedness of those who are forgiven.

This is a reflection upon the good fortune of the speaker, upon the greatness of the grace that he has received. These display the characteristic parallelism of Hebrew poetry.

They parallel each other, but also have a parallel within themselves. When we encounter such parallelism, we can often be inclined to skim over it, to regard it as merely stylistic and superfluous repetition of the same thought in some other words.

However, closer examination generally reveals that more is going on. The parallelisms tend to develop, or to fill out the thought in some way. And here that is definitely the case.

Forgiveness of transgression is filled out in the notion of the covering of sin. The rebel has been pardoned, and his crime has been removed, covered over, not in guilty concealment, but through its being revealed and addressed.

[2 : 4 3] The second line develops the thought in a more relational direction. The man who is blessed with such pardon has no charge counted against him by God. He is a person in good standing with his creator.

In Romans chapter 4 verses 6 to 8, the apostle Paul quotes this verse to substantiate his point about the person whom God justifies apart from works. This is a sinner, undeserving of forgiveness, who purely through divine mercy and grace, now enjoys the happiness of right standing with God.

The internal parallel deals with the blessedness of the internal state that corresponds with this non-imputation of iniquity. Such a person has no deceit in his spirit.

He can be open with God and open with his neighbour. He doesn't need to cover up his sin, because God has covered it up in forgiveness. David will go on to explore something more of the damage that deceit in the heart of unforgiven persons can do in verses 3 to 5.

The psalmist here describes his personal experience of this. He's giving testimony here. He's encouraging others to join him in dealing with their sins in the same manner. As long as he was silent about his sin, covering it up, he wasted away inside.

[3 : 56] Not just spiritually, but physically, it gnawed away at him. It robbed him of joy, of sleep and of strength. However, when he confessed his sin, he knew release and forgiveness from the Lord.

He could relate to the Lord once more openly. When he ceased to cover up his iniquity, the Lord could cover his iniquity. He describes his confession in paralleled expressions.

I acknowledged my sin. I did not cover my iniquity. I will confess my transgressions. While addressing the Lord, David expresses his desire that every person committed to the Lord take the same approach as he did, and discover the same relief.

People who confess their sins in such a manner will not be overwhelmed, even though all troubles might come against them. The Lord will protect all those who flee to him, providing them with a secure hiding place and joyful assurance of their deliverance.

It's unclear who is the speaker and the addressee in verse 8, especially as the you is singular. It might seem to be the Lord addressing the worshipper. The verse describes a guidance provided with instruction and a guidance provided with oversight.

[5 : 05] For the person who had languished in unforgiveness, this offers direction and clarity of path that he had formerly lacked. The psalm concludes with a more general exhortation.

The heroes of the psalm should beware of stubbornness and should be receptive and attentive to the word of God addressed to them, not needing to be driven or dragged around like an uncompliant animal.

The wicked person will find that his way is a miserable one, afflicted with many troubles that he has largely brought upon himself. However, the one who trusts in and turns to the Lord, uncovering his sin, experiences the Lord's steadfast love as the Lord covers his sin in forgiveness.

This experience, the experience of the forgiveness of sins and right standing with God, leads to gladness and praise, in which the psalmist concludes by calling all of those who share this experience to join him.

A question to consider. How might the covering up of our sins lead us to waste away?