

THE GUILTY PARTY

PSALM 32 JANUARY 30, 2023

When someone is declared bankrupt many (but not all) of their debts are wiped out. But first their assets are liquidated and sent to creditors. Their accounts are left empty and their record is left with a mark that makes future business difficult or impossible. The Biblical bankruptcy process is much less punishing for the debtor. Paul explains in Colossians 2 that, for those who are saved:

Colossians 2:14 - ¹⁴**[God has] erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross.**

All the wrong things you've done in word, thought, or action count toward your spiritual debt. If you had 1,000 lifetimes of good works you wouldn't come close to paying it off. But God offers you a full pardon and is willing to go into His own pocket to pay your debt. If you let Him, He will not leave you empty-handed. He will immediately fill your eternal accounts with more than you could ask or imagine and will make you His Friend for all eternity.

In Psalm 32, David tells us how he personally discovered God's forgiveness - how he went through this spiritual bankruptcy process. He went in being crushed by the weight of his guilt. But then he received God's forgiveness and came out stronger, more secure, and more joyful than ever before.

Psalm 32:Superscript - Of David. A Maskil.

As an author, David is worth listening to. Of course, he's writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and that is reason enough. But as a writer, David speaks with the authority of experience and expertise. John Phillips points out that David is one of the greatest sages of Scripture, one of the greatest saints, and one of the greatest sovereigns. But he is *also* one of the greatest sinners.¹ So when he speaks about forgiveness and closeness with God, we should pay attention.

Psalm 32:1-2 - ¹**How joyful is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!**
²**How joyful is a person whom the Lord does not charge with iniquity and in whose spirit is no deceit!**

From the start, David wants us to feel *joy* as we realize God has made His forgiveness available to *any* person who is willing to receive it. That is good news which should fill up our hearts with celebration. Right from the start of this book, in Psalm 1 we're told about the eternal joy that God wants for people. The problem is, we're unable to walk that road of righteousness on our own. We don't qualify. We fall short of the standards of righteousness. But now David reveals that there is a way to attain that spiritual happiness thanks to the *forgiveness* of God. The message of the Psalms is that *anyone* can walk with the Lord, *anyone* can be forgiven no matter what they've done because He has made it possible.

¹ John Phillips *Exploring Psalms Volume 1*

In verses 1 and 2, David describes a spectrum of sin. Commentators note that he uses three terms for those wrong things we do. The first is transgression, which speaks to us of rebellion against God. The second is sin, which means falling short or missing the mark of perfection. The third is iniquity. This is a term that speaks of corruption and twistedness - acts of evil.² So we see David isn't just talking about the worst of wickedness that men do. He's talking about *all* of the wrong things. From basic imperfection to abject evil. It all applies and he says that *all* of it can be forgiven.

David also gives three different terms to describe what the Lord wants to do with our sin and guilt. First, He forgives. The Lord promises to carry our sins away and remember them no more. Second, David says our sins can be covered. It doesn't mean a cover-up in the negative sense. And it doesn't mean just sweeping our guilt under a rug for it to fester.

Some of you have had a stain on a wall and when you tried to paint over it, the stain bled through the new coat. But, if you first treat that wall and paint on Kilz primer, that will put an end to the stain. God cleans while He covers. The Bible explains that the blood of Jesus cleanses us and makes us brand new. It purifies us and covers us in righteousness so we can walk with God.

Third, David tells us that God will not charge us with iniquity. Perhaps you saw the story of Irmgard Furchner. At age 18 she worked as a secretary in a Nazi concentration camp. Almost 80 years later, the law finally caught up with her and she was brought to court. At her job, all she did was paperwork. But that was enough for her to be charged and found guilty for aiding in the murder of more than 10,000 people.³ There was nothing she could do to free herself from her guilt. The charges were waiting for her after all those decades.

God knows *exactly* what we've done. The thousands upon thousands of counts of imperfection, of rebellion, of hate, of wickedness, of selfishness, of meanness, or vice. And we're guilty of them all. But God makes us this offer to carry them away, to cover, and to never charge us for any of it.

The offer sounds amazing until we read. "In whose spirit is no deceit." Do we have to be perfectly honest before we can be forgiven? Jeremiah says, "The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable."⁴ So is this an offer that we can't actually enjoy? Is this like one of those mailers you get claiming someone is going to win a million dollars when, clearly, no one is going to win?

Jesus once said to Nathanael, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom is no deceit." Was that *literally* true? We don't know a lot about Nathanael, but we know that he made the same mistakes as the other disciples. He argued over who was the greatest. He failed to be there at the foot of the cross, choosing instead to run and hide. And one of the only times he *does* speak in the Bible is when he scoffs at the idea that *anyone* from Nazareth could be used by God. Or consider David himself. He had many moments of terrible dishonesty.

² James Montgomery Boice *Psalms Volume 1*

³ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-convicts-97-year-old-woman-nazi-war-crimes-media-2022-12-20/>

⁴ Jeremiah 17:9

This 'no deceit' line shows that forgiveness is not only about settling a debt. It is the beginning of a transformative process which completely changes us from the inside out. God doesn't just say, "I'll square your debt," He goes further and says, "I'm going to make you a new creation."

On top of that, the term for deceit here can refer to slackness, or a sluggishness to do an activity.⁵ David shares that he had that sluggishness at first.

Psalm 32:3-4 - ³When I kept silent, my bones became brittle from my groaning all day long. ⁴For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was drained as in the summer's heat. *Selah* (There, what do you think of that?)⁶

In case we are starting to think, "Ok, this loving God just forgives everything, so I can do whatever I want and then just fall backward into mercy," David explains what happens when we keep our guilt. We don't know when David wrote this song or what situation he was referring to. Some scholars tie it to his sin with Bathsheba, and that's definitely a contender. Whenever it was, he had fallen into sin and then held his guilt in his heart. He closed the Lord out and tried to act like nothing was wrong. But it started eating him alive. We know something about summer heat, right? David said this guilt that he was holding in was like those dog-days of late July. 115° but with no A/C, no shade, no ice.

David was a *strong* man. He had killed giants and lions and bears with his own hands. But he was no match for guilt. Did you know being "weighed down by guilt" is more than a metaphor? In 2013, Princeton published a study showing that the feelings of guilt are, indeed, felt like weight in our minds and bodies.⁷ David felt it eating him from the inside, crushing him from the outside.

In verse 4, was David suggesting that God was inflicting this pain on him? On the one hand, we have to take this Psalm with the Psalms before and after. In Psalm 31 David wrote, "my strength has failed because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away." He rightly understood the destructive nature of sin. Paul talks about this in Romans 1, where sinners are left to deal with the appropriate consequences of their choices.

At the same time, though God is ready to *forgive* sin, He will not *ignore* sin. He applies firm pressure on the sinner in order to draw us to repentance, so He can remove the weight of our guilt. He tells His children that He *will* discipline them when they sin, because He loves them.

I was a lifeguard for a few summers in college. I always enjoyed practicing removing a swimmer with a neck injury from the pool. You would go in, apply a hold with firm pressure, rotate that swimmer into position, and get them strapped tight onto a backboard so they could be lifted out of the water. If not, the person would die. God applies *that* kind of pressure when we dive into sin.

⁵ *Dictionary Of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*

⁶ The meaning of *Selah* is debated, but one helpful understanding of the term is "There, what do you think of that?" See Phillips.

⁷ <https://www.princeton.edu/news/2013/10/08/weighed-down-guilt-research-shows-its-more-metaphor>

Psalm 32:5 - ⁵Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not conceal my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah (There, what do you think of that?)

All David had to do to receive God's forgiveness was *confess*. Technically, we don't even see his confession here. He says, "I *will* confess to the Lord," and *immediately* forgiveness flowed, the guilt was gone, and David had the relief he needed. So, what *is* confession? Confession is more than just saying a few words. Confession means to realize God's truth in your heart, *agree* with that truth, turn from your sin and face God, saying, "I am guilty, I am sorry, and I want to receive Your mercy."

Does this mean that, as a Christian, I don't *have* forgiveness for individual sins until I confess? There are some churches that hold a doctrine like that. If you're a Christian, if you've been born again, you *have* eternal forgiveness right now. In Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace that He has poured out on us.⁸ God never comes back with a sponge to sop up what He poured out. But we also read in 1 John, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins." So which is it?

There are two aspects of forgiveness. The first is *judicial*. Has your debt been paid? If you are in Christ, then Christ's death on the cross dealt with all your sin, past, present, and future. You are sealed into a promise. When the Judge of heaven and earth looks at you, He sees His Son and pronounces you clean. But there is also *relational* forgiveness. When we rebel against God or go our own way, we remove ourselves from His boundaries and His leading and His commands. Those sins bring breeches and barriers in our relationship with the Lord. Through confession we are able to once again live in the fullness of His grace.

This is depicted in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The son went out from the father's house on his own way, into ruin. The father did not announce, "the Prodigal is no longer my son." He was still his son. But once the son came to his senses and returned home, he was able to have not just the *title* of son, but the benefits of the father's love and they embrace and reconcile and rejoice together.

Another question is: If God knows everything, then why do I need to confess? Isaiah 55 explains that when we seek God, when we confess and abandon our own way and instead embrace the Lord, He is able to cover us with His compassion and freely forgive. Through confession we step from the shadow of guilt into the light of God's mercy. The Prodigal not only had to *mentally* admit he was wrong, he had to also leave the pigsty and return to his father. Proverbs 28 says, "whoever confesses and renounces [their sin] will find mercy."

David said, "I did not conceal my iniquity." We're no good at covering over our sin. That's the job the Lord wants to do. Don't think for a minute you can clean yourself up for God.

Awhile ago, one of our little ones got sick to their stomach in the middle of the night. We went in to make sure they were ok and we said, "Where did you throw up?" They said, "In the bathroom. But I

⁸ Ephesians 1:7-8

cleaned it up." Let's just say, "*clean*" isn't the word I would use. It was the middle of the night. They were sick. It was dark. They grabbed whatever towel they could and did their best. But they needed a parent to actually take care of it. Don't try to cover your sin. Let the professional take care of it.

Psalm 32:6-7 - ⁶Therefore let everyone who is faithful pray to you immediately. When great floodwaters come, they will not reach him. ⁷You are my hiding place; you protect me from trouble. You surround me with joyful shouts of deliverance. *Selah* (There, what do you think of that?)

David is not suggesting all his problems were immediately solved. He was a man who knew many troubles for many years. But, in the *final* judgment, David knew he was safe. He would be delivered just as Noah was in the ark when the flood waters came.

There's a judgment coming. If you're not a Christian, you're going to be judged for your sin. You will stand before God's throne and your debts must be paid. Without Christ, there's no deliverance.

There is also a global judgment coming one day. The whole world will be flooded with the wrath of God. Knowing that judgment is coming, let everyone who is faithful pray immediately. If you want salvation, there is no time to lose. Call out to God for forgiveness. Hide yourself in Him. Don't wait. God is ready to receive each of us as spiritual refugees, covering us and sustaining us and making us new. That's not just David's opinion - The Lord Himself would verify the message of this song. It's the Lord speaking⁹ in our next verses, where we read:

Psalm 32:8-9 - ⁸I will instruct you and show you the way to go; with my eye on you, I will give counsel. ⁹Do not be like a horse or mule, without understanding, that must be controlled with bit and bridle or else it will not come near you.

Why would anyone refuse God's offer of salvation and forgiveness? It happens every day. In fact, we saw a few weeks ago in our study of Isaiah 1 how God's people had become so stubborn, so hard-hearted that they *were*, indeed, dumber than donkeys, spiritually speaking.

The truth is, our hearts are inclined to evil. We're prone to wander. And we'll wander right into ruin if we don't trust the Lord and go His way.

Harry Randall Truman, not the president but the Mt. Saint Helens resident, was warned to evacuate his home in 1980. Precursor earthquakes had knocked him out of bed as he slept, so he moved his mattress to the basement. He told interviewers, "[that] mountain is a mile away, [it] ain't gonna hurt me...You couldn't pull me out with a mule team."¹⁰ No mules would be necessary. On May 18 he was vaporized along with everything he owned with the volcano erupted.

⁹ Derek Kidner *Psalms 1-72*

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_R._Truman

A person who doesn't admit they're a sinner and then receive the free gift of God's salvation is like Harry Randall Truman. They're like an ignorant mule, with no understanding.

"I will show you the way to go; with My eye on you, I will give counsel." God guides not with a whip, but with gentleness.¹¹ The "way" He shows us is that "way" from Psalm 1 - the way where everything we do prospers. Where our lives are made strong and fruitful, weathering the seasons that come our way, always growing, always developing. This is where the Lord wants to guide us.

John Phillips gives us some important insight here. He writes, "If the Lord is to guide us with His eye, it means that we must stay close to Him. A person cannot give another person a *warning* look or a *warm* look or a *welcoming* look if he is in Chicago and the friend is in Atlanta. Let us see to it that we allow our Lord to guide us by keeping our Bibles open and our eye ever looking to Him. He will make it plain what we ought to do." God's counsel isn't only for the sinner on the day of his salvation, it's also for the saint every single day of their life.

Psalm 32:10 - ¹⁰Many pains come to the wicked, but the one who trusts in the Lord will have faithful love surrounding him.

To trust God means to depend on His faithful love.¹² It means to put our hope in Him, rather than our own strength or our own plans or the systems of this world. To trust the Lord means to enter into this covenant love He talks about - His *hesed*. That we acknowledge the truth about ourselves, and that we receive His love and love Him in return. That's how we walk in the joy of this song.

Psalm 32:11 - ¹¹Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous ones; shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

A Psalm like this makes us think a lot about our mistakes and how we fall short of God's glory. But let's remember what David's perspective is: He started with joy, he's ending with joy. He says, "Here's what's true about God's forgiveness. Here's how we can all have it day-by-day, no matter what we've done. Here's how God plans to revolutionize our lives and surround us like a shield and a refuge and a Teacher and with the kindness of a Friend. So let's praise the Lord for it!" If we pause to consider all that God had forgiven David, or all that God forgave Paul, or all He has forgiven you and me, the spiritual reaction should be like finding out you've won the lottery.

Despite his many mistakes, David felt no need to carry his guilt any more. He confessed it and turned from it. It was done, it was gone. And it was replaced by *joy*.

How joyful are you? That's how our text opened, right? "How joyful is the one." David says forgiven people are joyful people. Paul does too. He described himself as overflowing with joy in 2 Corinthians. The Christian life is supposed to be full of joy and peace, overflowing with hope. Because the Lord bears away our guilt and leads us into a way full of joy.

¹¹ J.J. Stewart Perowne *Commentary On The Psalms*

¹² Psalm 33:18

Has God borne away your guilt? Or are you still on the run? In September of 2021, Irmgard Furchner went on the run, hoping to avoid her trial. She was picked up a few hours later.¹³

Maybe you're on the run, spiritually speaking. You can't avoid the Judge. Turn yourself in. When you turn yourself in to *this* Judge, He cleans your slate, cancels your debts, makes you new. You don't have to work off your guilt. You are saved by grace through faith, not of works.

In fact, when Paul spoke in Romans about how we are justified by faith alone, how salvation is all a work of grace, he used *this* Psalm as the Old Testament basis. If you believe what God has revealed in the Scripture, if you come to him in repentance, acknowledging your spiritual bankruptcy, He will forgive you.

For Christians, forgiveness isn't new, but it's not finished either. In this Psalm, David reminds us that God's forgiveness still applies and we who are faithful can stay in that closeness with the Lord, we can be quick to praise, quick to rejoice, quick to pray in confession as we discover more and more of what God has saved us from and what He has saved us for and we walk with Him on this way He's leading us.

¹³ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/96-year-old-german-woman-released-after-going-run-skip-n1280876>