

The Place of Blessing Psalm 32

Introduction

Are you familiar with the term “no brainer”? It’s a term usually applied to a situation or a decision that is so patently obvious that we don’t even need to use our brain to make the right decision. The equivalent phrase among kids today is, “Well, duh!”

The late songwriter Jim Croce didn’t use the term “no brainer,” but he used the idea when he wrote, “You Don’t Mess Around With Jim.” The chorus says, “You don’t tug on Superman’s cape, you don’t spit into the wind, you don’t pull the mask off the ol’ Lone Ranger, and... what? you don’t mess around with Jim.”

Those are all “no brainers.” Everyone knows you just don’t do those things. If you pull up to a stop light behind a motorcycle gang, and they don’t take off when the light turns green, you don’t lay on your horn. That’s a no brainer.

This morning we’re looking at Psalm 32, which speaks of being blessed by God. If I were to ask, “Do you want to be blessed by God, or do you want to incur His wrath?” that would be a no brainer, wouldn’t it? But there are some things in this psalm about being blessed by God that are a little bit surprising, not exactly “no brainers.” Would you open your Bibles to Psalm 32, and follow along as I read?

Read Psalm 32:1-11.

Look again at those last two verses. That’s where I want to begin this morning. This is what I call...

I. The Conventional Wisdom on Being Blessed by God

Conventional wisdom has always taught that God *blesses* the *righteousness* and *punishes evil-doers*. Isn’t that essentially what v.10-11 say?

Read v.10-11.

The righteous ones – the upright in heart – are blessed, and the wicked are punished. That’s the prominent theme of all wisdom literature in Scripture. It’s the underlying thesis of the entire book of Proverbs. We see it directly in many of the proverbs such as...

- Prov. 10:16 – The wages of the righteous is life, the income of the wicked, punishment.
- Prov. 11:5-6, 8 – The righteousness of the blameless will smooth his way, but the wicked will fall by his own wickedness. The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, but the treacherous will be caught by their own greed. The righteous is delivered from trouble, but the wicked takes his place.

- Prov. 13:21 – Adversity pursues sinners, but the righteous will be rewarded with prosperity.

This conventional wisdom is the first theme introduced in the book of Psalms. Look at Psalm 1...

Read Psalm 1.

That's conventional wisdom – and it's 100% biblical. It's built on the character of God. But it doesn't tell the whole story. In fact, if that's the only theme of Scripture that we know, *we will never experience* God's blessing! We will be no different than every other religion in the world, and barely different from the social moralist who doesn't even believe in God.

Everyone knows "crime doesn't pay." Everyone knows "what goes around comes around." Everyone knows that society rewards good and punishes evil. That's the very fabric of our culture. If you do what's right, if you work hard, if you're honest, and treat others well, and love your wife and family, and you're loyal to your friends, kind to others, and fear God, your life will generally be good.

That's a "no brainer." That's obvious truth. But it's not really the message of Psalm 32. And that's why this psalm is so important. It's the "unconventional wisdom" of this psalm that really puts the focus where it belongs. I've described it as...

II. The Shocking Truth About Being Blessed by God

That sounds like a headline you'd read at the grocery store check-out line, doesn't it? But listen again to how this psalm begins.

Read v.1-2.

We're so familiar with this psalm and the teaching of these first two verses that we don't feel the shock. But think about the contrast here with conventional wisdom. Psalm 1 is conventional wisdom. It says that God's blessing rests upon the one who "does *not* walk in the counsel of the wicked, and does *not* stand in the path of sinners, and does *not* sit in the seat of scoffers." But Psalm 32 says that God's blessing is available to the transgressor of the Law, to the sinner, to the one who commits iniquity. That's radical!

That's why I wanted us to start at the end of the psalm. We need to see this psalm from the standpoint of conventional wisdom to appreciate the power of its real message. Everyone knows God blesses the righteous, but **God's blessing is available to transgressors, sinners, and those guilty of wrong doing**. That's shocking! But it's also great news because that's who we are! You and I are sinners and transgressors, and we occasionally commit shameful acts. This psalm tells us we are not disqualified from God's blessing because we have failed.

God makes allowances for those who mess up. God loves sinners. In fact, the self-righteous are far more offensive to God than are those who know they are dependent upon His grace. Consider the prodigal son and his older brother. The prodigal represents failures, sinners, and mess-ups who recognize how undeserving we are. We know we can only come to God empty handed, casting ourselves on His mercy and

grace. The older brother represents the self-righteous, like the Pharisees, who considered themselves worthy of God's favor and blessing. This psalm pronounces a blessing on sinners!

Now, of course a further explanation is needed, and that's what we're about to see in the next few verses. In v.1-2 we see that this blessed man's (1) transgression is forgiven, (2) his sin is covered, and (3) his iniquity is not imputed, not charged against him. But we're not yet told why. That's what follows, and it's the heart of this psalm.

I've called it...

III. The Only Pathway to Being Blessed by God

Read v.3-4.

These are the wages of sin *in the here and now*. Sin destroys us, beats us down, and takes away our life, our peace, and joy. **But the problem David experienced was not merely his sin. It was what he did about it. He tried to hide it.** He even tried to hide it from God... or at least ignore it and hope it would go away. But that didn't happen. As I read this, I see...

- v.3 speaking of David's guilty conscience and how that weighed him down and made him miserable. Then,
- v.4 describes the active role of God in disciplining him and making him even more miserable. The picture is one of an individual who has despaired of life.

But then David came to his senses... Read v.5.

This is the most important verse of the psalm. It describes a genuine repentance which recognizes and owns up to failure, lays it out before God, and purposes to be restored to a right relationship with God through obedient trust in God.

Illustration

This weekend the Angels are playing the Texas Rangers. The Rangers have an outfielder named Josh Hamilton who is just loaded with talent. But several years ago, as a young ballplayer, Josh got into Cocaine and alcohol and ruined his life. He was out of baseball, estranged from his family, and cleaning toilets for a living. Then someone had the compassion and courage to share Christ with Josh, and he turned his life over to Jesus and was radically transformed. He restored his life and his relationships, he got back into baseball, and he was completely clean. Last year he wowed the baseball world with a spectacular display of power at the Home Run Derby before the All Star game, and suddenly he was a baseball celebrity.

But just a couple of days ago, there was a posting on the internet of secret photos taken of Josh Hamilton drinking in a bar in Arizona last January. It looked like it was going to be big news, another big scandal. But when he was confronted by the press this week, Josh stood tall and answered every question. He didn't make excuses. He told how he had realized right away what a big mistake he had made, and that before anyone else even knew about it, he called his wife and his employer the next morning and told them exactly what had happened. And he went to the Lord and laid it all out and cast himself again on God's grace. With God's help he

refused to throw away 5 ½ years of sobriety and the new life God had given him. And God blessed him and restored him and even shielded him from a worse fate.

That's what this psalm is about, not hiding our sins, but taking them to God. How much better it is to never fail, never sin, but that isn't reality. So, what becomes just important is how we deal with our failures. Like David, Josh cast himself on God's mercy.

As we read on, we see...

- in v.6 that David urges others to follow his example – Read v.6.
- In v.7 he testifies to the restoration he received from God – Read v.7.

So how do we apply this? What do we do when we blow it? The first thing to do when we recognize that we have sinned is to take it to God. Don't try to hide it or ignore it and hope nothing will come of it. We need to confess it to God without excuses. Agree with His word about the wrongness of what we have done and turn from it. Honesty is the only policy for rightly relating to God.

- **Proverbs 28:13** says, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who *confesses* and *forsakes* them will find compassion."

Another way to apply this in a more proactive sense is to practice a daily self-examination before God in which we attempt to identify anything worthy of confession as sin. We're all familiar with **I John 1:9** which says, "**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**" But what you might not have realized is that the tenses of the verbs in the Greek text imply a continual, ongoing process. It's fair to say that God wants us to be "habitual confessors," and He will prove Himself to be a habitual forgiver and cleanser. Blessing comes to the habitually repentant.

We should strive to maintain a clean slate at all times. I don't mean in some kind of legalistic fashion, but just as a means of always keeping our relationship with God – and with others – on the most positive of terms. We are never going to be without sin in this life. We might as well quit pretending. What a difference it could make in our relationship with God and with one another if we would openly admit our faults and failures and directly ask for forgiveness!

Now at this point we're ready to rightly understand the place of the conventional wisdom with which the psalm ends. On my outline I've entitled this last section...

IV. Conventional Wisdom Rightly Understood Brings Lasting Blessing

Read v.8-9.

This is God speaking in these two verses, not David. God promises that He will instruct us and teach us how we are to live and carry out His moral will, and He will do it in a very personal manner, with "His eye upon us." Each one of us who has come to Christ has received the Holy Spirit living within us. It doesn't get any more personal than that. And when we open God's word, He will help us to understand and obey. He promises

to instruct us. Our responsibility is to listen and obey.

Now, look carefully at those last two verses again. Verse 11 speaks of “righteous ones” and of those who are “upright in heart.” Who exactly are these, in light of verses 1-7? They’re definitely NOT the self-righteous individuals who strive to be good enough to please God by their own goodness, and then offer Him their best efforts, expecting to be rewarded for their piety and morality. It’s not the Pharisee who is committed to proudly following every minutia of the Torah. It’s the one who faces his shortcomings and knows he doesn’t measure up, but rather casts himself on God’s mercy and grace. Look more carefully at v.10...

Read v.10. – trusts in the Lord.

When we come to Christ, and truly understand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus and a child of God, we will begin to live our life with the purpose of honoring God. We will seek to live according to the commands and principles of Scripture, and put away all the habits and actions and even the attitudes and thoughts that are displeasing to God. But the real measure of our understanding of our relationship with God is not just how consistently we do the right thing – as important as that is – but it’s what we do and how we respond when we have failed. We confess, repent and turn, and trust God to forgive and restore. That’s why we can “be glad in the Lord and rejoice.”

Conclusion

So, what do we do? Wanting to be blessed by God is a “no brainer.” Knowing how to make that happen is a little less obvious. We know it depends on His grace and our willingness to cast ourselves entirely upon that grace. But what can we take away with us this morning to make this a reality in our lives?

God promises in v.8 that he will instruct us and teach us how we need to be in order to experience His blessings. Here are three actions we can take which are completely consistent with what we’ve seen in Psalm 32.

1. Be sure that we have made *pleasing God* the true *priority* of our life. Even if we once took this stand in the past, we need to examine ourselves and see if we’re still actually living out that commitment.
2. Humbly and honestly assess ourselves everyday before God. What I’m suggesting is something like this: “I profess to be committed to Christ, but did my actions and thoughts today reflect that?” Wherever they did not, we need to confess it to God.
3. Remain vitally connected to Jesus by being in His word and abiding in Him throughout each day. We talk to Him in prayer, we listen to Him from His word, and we following Him through His enabling power.

How blessed we will be when our transgressions are forgiven, our sins are covered, our iniquity is not charged against us... and God is instructing and guiding us “with His eye upon us”!