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## “Lifting the Heavy Hand”

Sermon Series: *Clean Slate*, No. 2

August 18, 2024

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### Psalm 32:1-7

*1 Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. 2 Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them 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 on 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 all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. 7 You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.*

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We’re in the book of Psalms today, chapter 32, if you’d care to turn there with me. Psalm 32.

The nation of Israel’s first king...King Saul...lost his position because he became proud...he began to care more about what **people** thought of him than what **God** thought of him.

He became a people-pleaser...and really a self-pleaser...instead of a God-pleaser.

And so God sent the prophet...the last judge of Israel, Samuel, to say to Saul, **“You have done a foolish thing...you have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, He would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now...your kingdom will not endure...for the Lord has sought out a man after His own heart and appointed him ruler of His people...”**<sup>1</sup>

And of course that man who would replace Saul...who was little more than a boy at that moment...was David.

Lots of notions have been proposed as to what exactly made David a **“man after God’s own heart,”** but you know, I don’t think there is a more profound explanation than what’s presented here in Psalm 32.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel 13:13-14

Here, in David's own words...we find the attitude...the frame of heart...that God appreciates most, which is to have such a total openness to God that allows a person to be utterly honest about themselves.

A vulnerability before God that's born of trust.

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And you know...the remarkable thing is...what pleases God the most winds up giving us the most happiness and freedom. That goes against our culture's presumption, but it's really true: pleasing God is the way to the greatest life and the most complete happiness that we can ever have.

You want a joyful, peaceful life? Seek to please God above all else.

You want a miserable, discontented life? Seek, above all, to please yourself.

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Psalms 32 is one of seven, what are called "penitential Psalms," most of which, and probably all, were written by King David.

They're called "penitential" because they all include a deep sense of regret and remorse for wrong done. Most of them are, themselves, songs...prayers, really...of confession and repentance...of asking God for forgiveness.

Like Psalm 51, where David begins, ***"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love..."*** It's a prayer right from the start.

This Psalm 32 though, is different. This one is more of a lesson on the practice of asking for forgiveness, presented by a true expert in that field, since David understood well, not only the practice and the process, but also the great benefit of repentance and forgiveness...the benefit of having a clean slate before God.

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If you wanted just a sentence description of this psalm, you could actually use Proverbs 28:13, which says, ***"Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy."***

That's the message David is singing about here: unconfessed sin is stunting in every way...but...a person who confesses their sin and asks God for pardon finds, David says, "mercy in every way."

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If there was one characteristic of David that caused God to say he was a man after His own heart, it was David's willingness to be quickly and utterly open with God...even about his own mistakes and sins and failures.

This deep vulnerability...this is the sort of relationship God wants to have with all of us. He wants to be open and honest with us, and He wants us to be open and honest with Him...and this is what David is describing here.

He actually announces the benefit of confessing sin first, and if this sounds sort of familiar, it's probably because it's in the form of a beatitude – just like Jesus gave in Matthew 5.

***“Blessed is the one...”*** David writes in verse 1 there, ***“Blessed...happy...fortunate...is the one...whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered, whose sin the Lord does not count against them, and in whose spirit is no deceit.”***

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Now, here, again, is a Biblical interpretation principle that I mentioned last Sunday night in our study of Mark: when you see, more or less the same idea repeated three times in a row, that is a sign of emphasis and we're supposed to notice it.

When Jesus healed the blind man in Mark chapter 8, Mark tells us ***“his eyes were opened, his sight was restored and he saw everything clearly.”***<sup>2</sup> With those three descriptors, Mark is saying that the man's healing was complete and whole and perfect.

Here, David says the same thing about our blessedness when, ***“our transgressions are forgiven, our sins are covered and our sin is not held against us.”***

In other words, we can't do any better...our slates cannot get any cleaner than when we are living in the forgiveness of God.

That is the blessedness that is above all others.

John Calvin wrote that living in this sort of relationship with God is the foundation of all other happiness and blessedness. “All the other beatitudes...all the other declarations of blessing in the Bible depend on the blessedness commended here...the free favor of God by which he reconciles us to Himself.”

All blessedness begins with confession and forgiveness of sin.

So how do we get this?

David answers that too with his last comment there. Complete joy...freedom...happiness ***“comes to the one”*** verse two there, ***“in whose spirit is no deceit.”***

This all can come to the one in whose spirit there is no deceit. In other words, if we are not honest with ourselves about the state of ourselves...if we lie to ourselves about our need for God's forgiveness, we will never experience God's forgiveness and so...we will never experience this clean slate “blessedness.”

And King David knew that to be true ***personally***...and he offers his own personal testimony as the lesson in repentance.

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Now, don't miss this: this is the King of Israel writing a song that confesses his own personal sin,

the pride of keeping it to himself,

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<sup>2</sup> Mark 8:25

the effects that that pride had upon him,  
the final relenting and repenting of it to God,  
and then the great relief that came to him in experiencing God's forgiveness.

Don't miss the significance of this.

David is the real, historical earthly monarch of, at that time, one of the greatest nations and powers of the world. And yet he's neither too *dignified* nor too *important* nor too *exalted* to be *honest...with the world* about the state of his own heart.

This total lack of pretense...this humility and realness of his spirit...the willingness to be so utterly honest about himself and utterly open to God about himself...in front of the world...this sort of willingness is why God calls David a man after His own heart.

And this is exactly what leads to the blessedness of forgiveness.

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We who are too distinguished to admit our weaknesses...

We who rank too highly to be vulnerable about ourselves with others...

We who are above admitting our failures because of our position or role in society...

We who are too proud to publicly bend our knee to God...to even come to an altar to pray when He calls us...

We need to take a lesson from David.

We need to discover...or rediscover...that the way to the blessedness of a clean slate is through our vulnerability before God.

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So then David gives his testimony...and the short of it is this: he tried to keep his sin to himself. That was the problem. David sinned, and he knew it, and he tried to keep a lid on it.

In other places...in David's other Psalms, he writes about being assaulted by enemies that were external to him. Here though...the problem...the enemy...is all within himself...this unconfessed, hidden sin.

What sin, exactly, is he talking about?

He doesn't say and it doesn't really matter because, in the end, the problem became as much about the *hiding* of it as about the *sin itself*

Look at verse 3 there, David writes, "*When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.*"

Today we might call something like this a psychosomatic illness. We make ourselves truly, *physically* sick because we try to ignore our *mental* or *spiritual* condition.

In a backward kind of way, it's like an infection that we ignore...that we just let go.

At the risk of TMI (too much information), I'll liken this to a sinus infection I had once...some of you have experienced this, I'm sure.

At first, you think it's just a little cold, and you assume the annoyance will surely go away before long. But the longer you let it go, the more it hurts right here.

And if you don't do anything about...if you don't treat it, the pain spreads, doesn't it? Pretty soon, your whole jaw aches and your head hurts and your teeth even hurt.

And you don't want to eat because it hurts to eat, so then because you're hungry and your whole face hurts, you get irritable, and start snapping at other people, so now there's *that* sort of conflict to contend with.

The effects from just one little issue keep spreading and spreading...and making all of life worse and worse...until you deal with the root of the issue.

Unconfessed sin is just like that. Left alone, it will eventually devour body and soul.

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But here's where it really gets interesting. Beyond just the growing effects of the sin itself within us, we begin to suffer in another way. We begin to feel the added pressure of *God's conviction*.

You see, when we're ignorant of God's ideas of sin...when we don't know that we are displeasing God, God's Spirit is still trying to get our attention, but the pain of it isn't so bad.

But...when we *know* we've sinned, and yet we refuse to ask God for forgiveness...when we try to keep our sin hidden...that's when *God Himself* really brings the pressure, and *that's* what David is talking about there in verse 4, where he writes, "*Day and night your hand was heavy upon me.*"

That weight that we feel...it's there all the time, but it's especially noticeable when we're just quietly resting or driving or thinking or trying to sleep...that weight we feel that comes upon us...that's God...that's His Spirit bringing the unease...the tension...that gnawing sense that we've done something wrong.

God's heavy hand.

In a word, that's conviction.

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The Apostle Paul, who is, by the way, another guy who's not afraid or ashamed to confess even the ugly parts of his spiritual journey...he talks about this in Romans chapter 7. Paul writes, "*Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life...and I died.*"<sup>3</sup>

You see, when we don't know any better, all is fine.

But once we know better...once we know God and what He wants, the weight of doing what we know is wrong lands upon us like a heavy hand.

And the effect?

Paul says it's like death.

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 7:9

David describes it by saying, ***“my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.”***

Hey, we know what that’s like, don’t we?

Trying to work outside on a 95-degree day with high humidity? It can be like someone is physically pushing back at you – you feel it all over. You just melt...you wear out.

That’s the heavy hand of God bringing conviction.

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So why does He do that?

Does He just love to see us suffer?

Not at all!

He does that because He wants us to be blessed...happy...free! He wants us to have a clean slate before Him. But that can’t happen apart from repentance.

We can’t get a clean slate before God, or the blessing that comes with it, without acknowledging our sin and asking God for forgiveness.

That’s what King David found.

Verse 5 there, David writes, ***“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.”***

And that brings us back to the beginning, where David proclaims: ***“Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven!”*** God’s heavy hand of conviction is lifted and we can experience and live the blessing of the clean slate before Him.

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In this psalm, David brings a theology lesson and then his own personal illustration...and finally...he brings the challenge...the invitation. In verse 6 there he writes, ***“Therefore...let all the faithful pray to you, God, while you may be found.”***

All of us who know God...today, because of Jesus, we can come to God in confidence, even when it’s His own heavy hand that’s upon us.

That heavy hand...that conviction of His...it’s not to be feared. It’s to be appreciated, because it’s through that conviction that repentance comes,

and through repentance, forgiveness,

and through God’s forgiveness comes the blessing of a clean slate...

a fresh beginning...

a new start.

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Maybe you’re here and you don’t know Jesus today.

Jesus is God's son who died to pay for the sins we've committed against God, and if we'll put our trust in Jesus and ask for forgiveness for what we've done that's displeased God, God will forgive us, and we can have a clean slate before God even today. If you've never done that, I'd invite you...more importantly, God invites you to do that – to come to Him and find forgiveness because of Jesus.

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Now, on the other hand, maybe you do know Jesus, but you also know that God's Spirit has been pointing out something you're doing, or not doing, that God wants you to change. More and more, over the days, maybe weeks, maybe months...maybe years, you've been feeling God's heavy hand of conviction...and you've been trying to ignore it...to push it aside.

You've been unwilling to admit it, but today, you can't help but see it and feel it and know it.

Don't run from God any more. He welcomes you!

Whatever the circumstance, God welcomes you to Himself...to admit your mistake, to ask for – and find – His forgiveness, so that heavy hand of conviction might be lifted and so you can be restored.

A clean slate before God is possible for any who'd like one today.

What's required is the vulnerability and the humility to ask.

Like David – that's a person after God's own heart.

Would you want to ask God for forgiveness for something He's pointing out in your life?

**Closing Prayer:**

**Closing Song:** “Just As I Am”

**Closing Word**

David was trying to be someone he was not, and after a while, that dissonance in our lives tears us to pieces.

And God's behind it...not to harm us, but to heal us.

He's out for our blessing...our healing...but that only comes on His terms.

The writer of Hebrews says, “It's a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Yet it's a far worse thing to fall out of them.

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