

Sin Forgiven

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As an ordinary course in our evening service of worship, the ministry of the Word is the culmination of that worship and usually takes an hour of that worship. But in our communion service, those of us who minister the Word are asked to keep our messages somewhere within 30 or 35 minutes, and whatever subjects we may be dealing with, whatever series of sermons we are involved in in the other Lord's Day evenings, to seek to prepare a meditation that will in a very focused way prepare us to come to the Lord's table so that our coming to the table, though under the light of the Word, finds the Word preparing us for that privileged activity of remembering our Lord Jesus in the way of His appointment. And in keeping with that commitment that we presently believe as elders is unto optimum edification, I do want to speak to you relatively briefly this evening. And I'm going to ask you to turn with me to a portion of the Word of God that we will have occasion to come back to for the conclusion of our meditation--Psalm 32. Psalm 32 is one of the Psalms that most responsible Bible students believe was composed in conjunction with David's penitence with respect to his sin in the case of Uriah and Bathsheba. And when God by His Spirit through the instrumentality of the ministry of Nathan the prophet was pleased to bring David to deep repentance and confession of his sin, he penned these words:

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom Jehovah imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones wasted away through my groaning all the day long, for day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture was changed as with the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity did I not hide: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto Jehovah; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."

Now as we embark upon this new year and are found gathered here on the first day of the year, January 1, 1995, I believe, were we to conduct some kind of grassroots survey, we would find that many of us enter this new year with an array of burdens which we have no power in ourselves to remove. We come to this first day of the new year in the providence of God with a manifold, perhaps even number of personal and domestic burdens, which, though we can cast upon the Lord as we are commanded to do in Psalm 55:22 ("Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee"), we have no power to remove that burden. Perhaps it is the burden of declining health or chronic illness, the burden of joblessness or frustration as we seek to glorify God in our appointed career. For some, I know, it is the burden of ongoing singleness. When you recognize that God has made you that you might share life with one of the opposite sex in the bonds of marriage and know the joys of marital love and intimacy and family, and yet through no choice of your own, you carry the burden of an ongoing single state into this coming year. And I know there are others among you who carry the burden of an ongoing barren womb, the burden of childlessness, and others, the grief of the loss of a loved one, the grief of a wayward son or daughter,

the tremendous internal crushing that comes from the apparent frustration of all of your endeavors to bring those children, the fruit of your marital union, to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. I know there are others who live with the burden of a divided marriage. You have a spouse with whom you cannot share your deepest joys, your deepest griefs, your highest aspirations. Well, on and on we could go with the burdens represented by those sitting here tonight. We carry those burdens with us into this new year, 1995, and we are helpless to remove those burdens.

However, there is another burden that perhaps not a few of you have carried into this first day of 1995. But it is a burden which no child of God need carry into the second day of this new year, a burden that, in a sense, is the burden of all burdens. And yet, though it is the burden of all burdens, there is no reason for the child of God to carry it into the coming year. And it is the burden of unforgiven and uncleansed sin. The burden that David describes here in Psalm 32 that drove him into the state of emotional disruption so that there was groaning, the sense of the hand of God upon him day and night, apparently crying and weeping to the point where his tear ducts were dry. He was carrying that insufferable burden to the conscience of a true child of God, the burden of unforgiven and uncleansed sin. And my simple and straightforward appeal to every Christian in this place tonight is that you deal with that burden at the most appropriate place to have it dealt with. When sitting here tonight, there is spread before you the very visible tokens of the body of Christ given up as a sacrifice for sin, that token, an emblem of the blood of Christ shed that our sins might be cleansed and forgiven. And the central, focused passion of my heart is to entreat you as a child of God not to carry into this coming year the burden of unforgiven and uncleansed sin. And let me give you three very simple reasons from the Word of God as to why you should not carry that burden.

The first is this: the provision of God for our sins is unquestionably adequate. We have such statements as these in the Word of God: 1 John 1:7: "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son [goes on cleansing] us from all sin [sins of thought, sins of word, sins of attitude, sins of deed, sins of the heart, sins of the hand, sins of the mind]." There is no sin of any kind in any category for which the blood of Christ is not an adequate provision fully to cleanse us. Further on in this very epistle (chapter 2 and verse 1): "My little children, these things write I unto you that ye may not sin. And if any man sin [and no qualification is made upon the nature of that sin], we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins." He embodies in Himself all the virtue of that sacrifice by which He turned away the wrath of God which every sin deserves, whether it be a sin of thought, word, desire, deed, intention, of sins seen only by the eye of God or a sin placarded before all around us. He is the propitiation for our sins. And as we heard so eloquently and powerfully several weeks ago in this place, He cried from His cross, "It is finished!" And payment was made for every sin, so that the Scripture tells us in Hebrews 9:12, "nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption." And then the writer to Hebrews goes on to amplify on the perfection of that once for all sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. Chapter 10 and verse 12: "But He, when He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God." Child of God, why should you, why should I enter into this new year carrying the burden of unforgiven and uncleansed sin when the provision of God for our sins is unquestionably adequate?

But not only does the Bible teach us that the provision of God for our sins is unquestionably adequate, in the second place, the promise of God with respect to forgiving our sins is unquestionably certain. Someone might reason, "My problem is not the adequacy of the provision for forgiveness. But is God willing to forgive me this sin, this sin for which I've had to come to Him a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand times? Is there a promise with respect to His forgiving my sin that is unquestionably certain? Well, here we could multiply texts, but let's just look at a couple of them that epitomize the whole teaching of Scripture. Psalm 130:4 is one of the most precious texts on the subject of forgiveness found anywhere in the Word of God. The Psalmist asked the searching question in Psalm 130:3: "If thou, Jehovah, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" If God were to mark our iniquities with a view to calling us into account for them and there were no forgiveness provided, no way of pardon and cleansing open to us, who among us would stand before the God who knows the deepest secrets of our hearts, who sees the first springs of anger and of lust and of envy, who sees with His eye of omniscience, according to the Scriptures, the eyes of the Lord that are in every place beholding the evil and the good, the first swellings of pride; who sees and hears all that is a violation of His holy law? "If Thou, Jehovah, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" It's a rhetorical question, the answer of which is clear: not a one of us. "If any man says he has not sinned, he is a liar, and the truth is not in him," John says. None of us could stand. But look at verse 4: "But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared." The promise of God with respect to forgiving our sin is unquestionably certain. There is forgiveness with the God, who if He marked our iniquities, could bring us all into judgment, and our mouths would be stopped before Him. But here is an unquestionably certain promise of forgiveness with this very God. Those promises could be multiplied many times over from the Scriptures.

But then I want you to think with me thirdly, not only is the provision of God for our sin unquestionably adequate, the promise of God with respect to forgiving our sin unquestionably certain, but here's the catch: the prerequisite of God with respect to our forgiveness is unquestionably clear. What is the prerequisite? It is not to do one thing to add to the virtue of the sacrifice of Christ. We'd like it if we were asked to do something to perfect the provision, if we were asked to find some loophole in the promise. But no, the prerequisite of God with respect to our forgiveness is unquestionably clear. And what is it? Here I ask you to turn to one of the most familiar verses in that same book of 1 John. 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Here is the promise of complete forgiveness of all our sins and cleansing from all our unrighteousness. But what is the prerequisite? "If we confess our sins...." And the word "confess" here in this context very simply means we stand with God accessing our sin to be exactly what He says it is. And we say the same thing about it that God says. "If we confess our sins", not if we make some general acknowledgement we haven't been all we should be; we haven't attained all that we ought to have attained to, not some vague, nebulous acknowledgement of being a general flop. It's "If we confess our sins [if we are prepared to name those risings of envy, that root of bitterness, perhaps a disposition of suspicion about the goodness of God because of some of those other burdens that He in His providence has laid upon you and that you cannot shed, the burden of your singleness, your barrenness, your broken heart over a wayward son or daughter]...."

I read recently in one of the popular magazines of someone writing in to one of the Christian gurus for counsel. Because this person said, "My wife and I have prayed

our eyes out for one of our children and they haven't been saved. The more we prayer, the more they go away from God, and I find myself bitter at God." What a horrible admission to be in, but at least they were admitting it. It's blasphemous to think that God owes salvation to anyone simply because he prayed. God owes salvation to no one.

But with respect to some of these burdens, perhaps those are the very things that are creating the sins of the heart: suspicions of God's goodness, questioning God's right to be God, bitterness and resentment directed to God, perhaps bitterness and resentment directed to the human instruments who are the cause in God's hands of laying some of these other burdens upon you. But whatever those things may be, the prerequisite of God with respect to our forgiveness is unquestionably clear: "If we confess our sins...."

The Old Testament passage that is parallel to this is Proverbs 28:13: "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy." Here's a prerequisite of obtaining God's forgiveness, His mercy unto pardon and cleansing: we must not cover our transgressions. David, in the passage we read in Psalm 32, covered his transgressions with silence. Verse 3 of Psalm 32: "When I kept silence...." All you need do is to be silent about those sins and refuse to confess them, you will not know God's forgiveness; you will not know God's cleansing. And if you're a true child of God, you will know an increasing burden of divine chastisement, "for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth", to the end, according to that Hebrews 12 passage, that we might be partakers of His holiness. And God will not allow His true children to go on forever in a course where they cover their sins.

David went on for a period of time (at least close to a year) covering his sin, covering it with silence, covering it with hypocrisy, seeking to go on in the administration of his family and the kingdom as though it were business as usual. And all the while, the cancer of the sin that gnawed at his conscience was working until his whole inner being, according to this passage and Psalm 51 as well, was being eaten up and consumed. The joy of Lord was lost. The sense of divine nearness was gone. Any sense of authentic witness was gone. And we read the tragic effects all because he would not confess his sin. And when we read the sequel of God's dealings with him through Nathan the prophet, one of the most beautiful statements in all of the Word of God--and I want you to turn there with me. 2 Samuel 12. David is in this wretched state. Day and night the hand of God is heavy upon him; his moisture is turned into the drought of summer. And God in mercy sends the prophet Nathan, captures his conscience and awakens it with a parable. Nathan says to David, "You are the man." And then the prophet lays out David's sin. 2 Samuel 12:7-10:

"And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the word of Jehovah, to do that which is evil in his sight? thou hast smitten Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thy house...." Verse 11: "Thus saith Jehovah, [I will do these things in a way of chastisement] Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house...." Verse 12: "For thou

didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel...." When the prophet was done indicting him--look at verse 13: "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against Jehovah." Simple: "I have sinned against Jehovah." I want you to expect the following: some words saying, "Well, in the light of the horrible extent of your sin, the amount of time you covered your sin, all of the horrible, growing circles of the tragic influence of your sin, David, grovel for the next six months begging and seeking forgiveness. And it may be God will be inclined to show mercy." That's Romanism. That's not Biblical religion. Listen to the word of the prophet: "And Nathan said unto David, Jehovah also hath put away thy sin." You mean in an instant of time? David says, "I have sinned." And the prophet answers, "Jehovah also hath put away thy sin." May I say it reverently. It's as though God was yearning and longing, bending over heaven, waiting for that prerequisite to be fulfilled. And the moment the first intimation of it was expressed with David, God's own heart of tenderness and mercy burst open to the language of the prophet: "Jehovah also hath put away thy sin."

You say a doctrine like that will make people go out and sin like the devil and just think that they can get quick and cheap forgiveness. No, no, my friend, if that's what you think, you've never known the sweetness of divine forgiveness. Forgiveness so free, forgiveness so undeserved humbles us, breaks us, crushes us and binds us in love and gratitude to a God who would be so merciful to the likes of us.

Dear Christian, whatever burdens you carry into the coming year, in the name of this God, in the name of His Son, in the name of that body broken and that blood shed for sinners, why carry that burden of a gnawing conscience into this coming year? Why carry the cancer of uncleansed and unforgiven sin, cutting off the nerve of communion with God, cutting off all of the nerve of vital witness, drying up the springs of holy joy and praise? Dear child of God, you know what your sin is. I don't, but God does. And I plead with you as we gather on this first day of the new year here at the table of the Lord, where our Lord Himself says, "Remember Me, but remember Me especially in terms of My body given and My blood shed for the forgiveness of sins here in this place tonight." May God grant that you'll take the posture of David. No, your sin has not been physical adultery or physical murder and betrayal of trust before the whole nation of Israel. But whatever your sin is, if you confess your sins, yours in particular, yours specifically, He is faithful and righteous to forgive. Righteous to forgive? Yes, because the payment for that sin has been made by His beloved Son. And it is righteous for God to forgive the sin of those who do confess it. "He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Whatever burden you may be called upon to carry into this coming year, and whatever burdens may yet be laid upon you throughout the year, wherein is true blessedness found? Not in being burdenedless. No, we come back to the Psalm with which we began: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom Jehovah imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile." May God grant that you will suffer the exhortation, child of God, and not carry the burden of unforgiven, uncleansed sin into this new year.

And for you who have never known the joy of sins forgiven, who have never taken the posture of the publican standing in the presence of God acknowledging you have nothing to commend yourself to Him, you may carry no perceptible burden. You may come lighthearted, you may come light-spirited into this new year thinking you've got the world by the tail, utterly unaware that there hangs upon you the most insufferable

burden that can hang over any creature of God, for the Scripture says the wrath of God abides on him that believes not. God's wrath like a frightening canopy hangs over your head if you have never gone in the posture of a penitent seeking forgiveness from the God of heaven in the way that forgiveness alone is tendered to sinners on the grounds of the person and work of the Lord Jesus. And so the entreaty I make to the people of God I make to you who have never come in repentance and faith. And I plead with you, do not carry the burden of sin into this coming year, for it may be the time when God will say, "Enough." "Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth." God grant that even as you see the people of God taking the emblems of the body of Christ given for sinners, the blood of Christ shed for sinners. If you will say, "O Lord Jesus, is that for me?" The answer of the Gospel is, "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely." "Him that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out."

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