

Life: The Shelter of God's Forgiveness

December 5, 2014

• *The Bible Studies for Life lesson for Dec. 21 focuses on Psalm 32:1-7.*

Introduction

Forgiveness is the core component of biblical religion. The New Testament emphasizes forgiveness in its description of the life and significance of the Lord Jesus Christ. Likewise, Old Testament faith was designed to point to the extension of forgiveness to those who seek to walk with the Lord in truth.

Psalm 32 expresses the greatness of receiving God's forgiveness. For those who have not truly experienced God's forgiveness, the biblical record seems to overemphasize sin and guilt. Yet this psalm describes the miserable and tragic consequences of bearing one's own sin. Receiving God's forgiveness not only is possible; it has tremendous results. Those who have received the release of God's forgiveness from sin and guilt and experienced its resulting peace and freedom truly are transformed, and they desire never to return to their former way of life.

Joy and blessing are the by-products of God's forgiveness (Psalm 32:1-2)

Psalm 32 has long been associated with Psalm 51 and David's sin of adultery and murder as told in 2 Samuel 11-12. Psalm 51 records David's confession. Psalm 32 is seen as David's song of forgiveness. Psalm 32 speaks of no specific circumstances; thus, its observations can refer to any instances of divine forgiveness David received, or all of them.

The real point of the psalm is not that God forgives great sins and thereby risking the very deceptive thought that so-called “little” sins do not need God’s forgiving attention, but that forgiveness is God’s way. God’s forgiveness heals broken souls, and his forgiveness paves the way to divine blessing.

Three words for sin occur in verses 1-2, whose cumulative effect describes the serious commitment to sinfulness that God, in turn, graciously and unrestrainedly forgives. The first word, “transgression,” speaks to rebellion or defying known statutes.

The second term, commonly rendered “sin,” means “missing the mark” and serves as an umbrella word for all wrong-doing. The third expression, “iniquity,” refers to the heart determination to oppose God’s will. These three words also appear in Psalm 51 where David describes his sin before God. Human involvement in sin is a serious matter. The triple emphasis shows the wicked character of human sinfulness and the deeply entrenched human involvement in it.

Forgiveness also is described in a three-fold manner, answering the three-fold review of sin. Forgiveness is first a lifting up, as in restoring, in response to rebellion. Then it is described as a covering, answering the general offense of sin. Finally, forgiveness is not reckoning or giving regard to the deeply set opposition to God. These carefully selected sets of words show God’s forgiveness answers the breadth of human sin as well as its deeply seated character. The remarkable discovery is God’s forgiveness is greater than human sin. This fact, with its life-changing effects, is worth celebrating and commending.

The last line of verse 2 delivers the required condition for forgiveness—the lack of deceit. God receives and forgives sinners, trespassers and practitioners of iniquity who truthfully acknowledge their ways before him. Deceit is associated with the character of sinfulness. Therefore, the lack of

deceit represents turning away from sin, making repentance and confession truthful. Upon this condition, God's forgiveness flows, and the remarkable results flood into the contrite individual's life.

There is no forgiveness without confession of sin (Psalm 32:3-5)

Verse 3 speaks of silence, here self-imposed, in the face of one's guilt. The next two verses describe in physical terms the toll of bearing the guilt of one's sin. Some look to these verses to find a psychosomatic connection between sin and physical illness.

While it may be clear from natural observations that sin takes a toll on one's physical being, the poetry of this psalm describes the misery caused by unreleased sin. These verses remind us the cure for sin cannot be found within. For those who wish to hold back their confession of sin, the very structure or core of their being withers. Such a burden causes constant misery and one's life-strength exhausts under the load.

This is the state of those who refuse to confess and repent. The Lord uses this condition to persuade, even encourage, people to confess their sins. His response will be benevolent, as we know, but the rabid counsel of sin distorts reality for the sin sick until those sick of sin break silence and beg for mercy. They are those who discover a forgiving God waiting.

Verse 5 narrates the process of confession in a way that reminds us of the awakening of the prodigal in Luke 15:17-20. Of course, David, like the prodigal son, found a vigilant and forgiving father waiting for the moment when the defiant silence of sin ended.

Living in a restored relationship with God places us under his care (Psalm 32:6-7)

David's silence now is replaced by song. He sings of the Lord's deliverance and protection. He is confident in his Lord because he has experienced the

greatest of all reversals of fortune. He was being destroyed by his rebellion against God, and yet God forgave him and delivered him into a blessed existence. This grand situation the Lord will maintain forever, for such is the nature of the Lord's deliverance.

So, what the sinner originally desired through rebellion is far out-classed by God's grand forgiveness. Such forgiveness can be had for mere honesty before the Lord. God does the rest and the results are outstanding beyond all expectations. Thus, the sinner is converted to the core and becomes a proponent of God's character and ways.