

THE BLESSEDNESS OF FORGIVEN SIN

Portion read: Psalm 32— *“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the lord imputeth not iniquity.”* This is quoted by Paul in Romans 4 as applicable to believers. Wherein consists the blessedness of forgiven sin? We must be able to answer this question to ourselves before we can enter into the sentiment. No man can count it to be a happy thing to be delivered from that which does not cause him distress. No one thinks it well to be delivered from that which does not trouble him. “Blessed is he whose sin is covered.” Sin—what is that? Disobedience to God. But have we attained to the state of feeling that disobedience to God is a source of unhappiness and trouble? It is manifest that no one can attain to this who has not attained to the knowledge of God. Paul says,

“He that cometh unto God ‘must believe that He is,’ and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him”
(Heb. 11:6).

Those to whom God is not a reality will never feel the distressfulness of sin. Here is the very foundation: that God is. We have been reminded this morning that we are—

“Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone”
(Eph. 2:20).

But the statement points to another foundation—underneath? What is underneath the apostles, the prophets and Christ? This is a matter requiring the exercise of the understanding. Let us not be deterred from the exercise of the understanding in connection with spiritual things. Many people are so deterred by the systems of superstition from which we have been emancipated. God Himself commands us,

“Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding.”

Paul prays that the brethren might be filled with understanding (Col. 1:9). So let us exercise our understanding. In this exercise we look at the apostles, the prophets and Christ. We are enabled to look at them, because they have left us a monument that nothing can remove or conceal. They have left us the Scriptures. Impossible it is that anyone could have written these Scriptures except the apostles and prophets. How came they to write? How came they to speak? How came they to do the things that they did, which brought no gain to them at all? Whether we look at Christ, or John the Baptist, or any of the prophets, it is always the same: they suffered. We ask—Why? There is only one answer; and that brings us down to the foundation which is underneath them. Moses did not go to Egypt of his own accord. He did not want to go. God sent him. Jeremiah did not want to prophesy. He said,

“Ah, Lord God! Behold I cannot speak, for I am a child.”

He was made a butt of ridicule—

“The word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me and a derision daily,”

But he could not restrain the fire that impelled him—

“His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.”

So with them all; there is a cause for their visible appearance upon the stage of time. There is a cause for all their work; and the application of the understanding will show there was only one cause. As soon as a man tries to explain the matter by another cause, the matter is beyond all understanding. The cause is that God sent them; God inspired them; God commanded them. As it is written—

“God at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets.”

Let us look at God then; He is the Alpha—the beginning of all. Not only the beginning of the work of prophets and apostles, but the beginning of creation—the beginning of life—the beginning of all, in a most absolute sense. No man can be said to have hold of the truth who has not hold of that, because that is the foundation—“*God from everlasting—Our Father.*” Let us get at that. We come to see it by the exercise of our mind. There is no other way. Are we tired of exercising our mind thus? Do we begin to feel apathy with regard to understanding? What then? Well, what happens to any man who tires on any road? Suppose he be a traveller in the snowy wastes of Russia; he tires, lies down, is frozen to death or eaten by wolves. Or suppose he be in the arid deserts of Africa; he tires, lies down, dies, and the vultures devour his flesh. Or suppose a man be in business, and tires in the direction of his affairs. He has splendid prospects, but he tires. What comes of it but failure and ruin? Now then, are we going to tire here? Are we going to cease the exercise of the understanding on matters which are of the supremest importance of all? If so, what is before us? Nothing but present misery and future perdition. ‘Present’ misery, for where can we get satisfaction and joy if not in the way of godliness. There is no satisfaction in folly. Oh, no; it is “out of the frying pan into the fire” if we forsake the Truth. Well, that is not a right comparison, for the Truth is not a frying pan in this sense. It is a place of comfort and peace. Whatever else we do, let us not weary in the way of understanding. It is a spring of life even now, and a source of glory inconceivable in time to come. Let us open our eyes. Let us look at God. He comes to be a fact to us at last. Understanding sees He must be, and the whole mind and feeling at last sets in the conviction that He is.

When we get thus far, we can feel the truth of this psalm. We learn what sin is, and understand the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. The greatness of God and the dreadfulness of sin are ideas that go together. Practically, we see what sin means in the case of Adam. One sin—not a great sin as men would reckon—brought death, and the countless evils that have since afflicted the human race. Sin is the non-conformity to God’s will as expressed in His commands. Why it should be esteemed so dreadful a thing we realise when we think what it is in relation to ourselves. It is the misuse of the highest prerogative God can confer upon a created being. He has given us the possession of an independent will, a free volition. It is a sharp instrument, a high privilege, but a dreadful responsibility. God hedges it by this proviso that it must not be exercised against Him. So stringent is this proviso that it is enforced by death. The will used against Him will be withdrawn.

“*The wages of sin is death.*” Now we are all sinners, for “*there is not a man that hath not sinned.*” If we understand this in the sense of feeling it to be true then we can understand this psalm. Though so very deep, it is so simple that a child can understand it, for what is forgiveness? It is the consent of God not to impute the sin that has been sinned—to let it pass. He offers to do this—to justify us, to consider us righteous on condition of our compliance with the conditions provided in the case. Surely the man is blessed—happy—who is in this relation to God. But, here we must consider again. Many people are happy that are not forgiven. They mistake the nature of forgiveness. Theology has taught them to regard it as an affair of feeling, they ‘feel’ they are forgiven; therefore they are forgiven. This is dangerous logic. Forgiveness is God’s act, not ours. It is something that takes place in God’s mind, and if he does not forgive, it matters not how we may feel. It may be illustrated in human affairs: suppose you have been offended, and you do not forgive the offender, because of his non-compliance with what you require, and suppose he is under the idea that you have forgiven him, does his idea alter the fact? The forgiveness to be a fact must be a something in your mind, not in his feelings. So forgiveness to be real must be in God’s mind. It is in this aspect of the matter that the tremendous importance of God’s conditions appears. It is no matter how we may stand with men in the matter, if we are not right with God. Look at the Roman

Catholics. Their priests claim the power of forgiveness; and they exercise the power for a consideration in cash. Nay, they will go further, and sell you liberty beforehand, to sin for 12 months or any other period. Now, the poor Roman Catholic, knowing no better, says to himself: "If the priest forgives me I am all right," and he pays his shillings and feels comfortable. Does that make God forgive him? Every one will say, "Of course not." But then they will say "But we are not Roman Catholics." Well, suppose they are not Roman Catholics but Episcopalians, is there case better? Episcopalianism is but a branch of the same thing modified, a daughter of the great Roman mother. "We have been baptised," say they, by which they mean water sprinkled and signed with the sign of the cross in babyhood. We have been confirmed", say they; that is, the bishop has laid his hands upon their heads. Or, "we go to the confessional," for even this abomination is finding a place in the country again. The clergyman says that Christ has given him power to forgive sins, and the Episcopalian may say "I have confessed to my clergyman," or, "I have confessed to my bishop and he says I am all right." Well, supposing 700 clergymen say you are all right, does that make God forgive if He choose not to forgive because of conditions totally disregarded? If God forgives not, what is the use of forgiveness at the hands of Episcopalian clergymen? If every soul in the church consider you forgiven, what is that to God if He sees fit not to forgive? But, you say, "I am not an Episcopalian; I am an Independent, or, I am a Baptist, or I am a Methodist (worse and worse)." Well, where is the difference if these systems are not in harmony with the apostolic system of righteousness? The same principle applies to all. If God forgives not, the approval of earth's total inhabitants is unavailing. There is but one safe test. It is the simple question whether we have complied with God's conditions, God's terms, God's requirements. Peter said to Christ,

"Lord, to whom shall we go but to thee? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

So may we say: "To whom shall we go?" The apostles are not in the land of the living. They are dead; but there is a living Christ with the Father. We cannot go to this living Christ as they went; but we become related to him by their testimony and invitation. They are in their graves, but their testimony lives, and this was the essential part—the treasure in earthen vessels. God has taken care that the treasure should not perish with the earthen vessels that contained it. He has caused as it were an immense many-chambered casket to be formed, into which it was placed for all to receive who sought for it. The Bible is this many-chambered casket. Reading therein we become built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. We become enlightened and justified by the faith we receive by hearing them.

The consequence, though glorious, is painful in one direction. We become despised and hated of men. The world detests what it calls the exclusiveness and bigotry of this position. This we must endure. No one buys a thing of any value without paying a good price for it. Justification, leading to salvation, is the most precious thing upon earth. Therefore you pay a heavy price for it towards man, though as regards God, it is cheap, *"without money and without price."* It demands the sacrifice of what is sweet to all men; the friendship of the world. No man can be a friend of the world and the friend of God at the same time. There is only one way in which a man professing the Truth can be a friend of the world, and that is by hiding what he is. As soon as you begin to let it be known that you believe in the forgiveness of sins by God's way alone, you are looked upon as a soft-brained fanatic, fit only for the society of women and children. What does Christ say about hiding the Truth?

"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid."

This is Christ's cue for us. This is the position for his servants to take. There must be no mistaking you—what you are, where your affections are, what you are living for. That is what Christ says. It is the devil who says, "You need not let it be known who you are." We have all got the devil to deal with. He is in us and around us. He says, "It will not pay." We answer, "It will pay splendidly by-and-by," for what does Christ say,

“Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.”

It seems a poor affair, and worse at present; but see it out. Let life close as it will, let Christ come as he will. It will then be seen that Christ’s affairs are the only affairs of ultimate consequence. Wisdom consists of sincerely and steadily looking the facts in the face, and conforming to the logic of them, refusing to be blinded by any of the many forms of dust-throwing.

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