

True Blessedness for Testing Times

by J. Glyn Owen

Through the message of forgiveness, we can find true blessedness and lasting bliss in the midst of trying and testing times.

Duration: 22:18

Scripture: Psalm 32:1

Topics: "Testing Times"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the necessity of forgiveness due to the universal reality of human sin. The psalmist uses different angles to portray the hideousness of sin, highlighting its presence in every human heart. The speaker humbly acknowledges that this reflection of sin applies to all of us. The sermon then explores the blight of sin that makes forgiveness necessary, the bliss that pardon brings, and how this gift is bestowed by God. The speaker also references John Bunyan's vivid description of God's grace as a plaster that can cover any wound of sin.

Transcript

We have given as a title to our message this evening the words Through Blessedness for Testing Times that we are passing through trying and testing times, I think is self-evident to all of us and one needs nothing whatsoever to elucidate that fact. It is part of a wonder of the message of the Gospel that it is possible by the grace of God, in the very midst of the most trying and exacting circumstances of life and of death, to know blessedness, true blessedness, lasting bliss and it is to this I want to turn tonight. I have been captivated over these recent days with the very remarkable words of the psalm we read earlier, Psalm 32 and I would like to read again as the basis of our message tonight the first two verses of this very wonderful psalm.

You remember that this is the second psalm that begins with the word blessed and both psalms, this and the first of the psalms remind us of the words of our Lord in the Beatitudes in the New Testament. The Bible has so much to say about the blessed life. Well now, verses 1 and 2 in Psalm 32 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. Surely, the sweetest word of all sweet words in the Christian vocabulary is this word forgiveness. And I have no doubt whatsoever, as we make mention of it all of us will be thinking of certain aspects at any rate of what forgiveness is.

The word is in and of itself most eloquent. We would all know, I suppose, what it means. The remarkable thing in this context is this.

The psalmist has a feeling that you can't really describe what forgiveness means by merely using one word. Whichever word you use, no one word is capable of plumbing the depths and expounding the hidden glories of this wondrous gift of God to sinful men. And so he heaps word upon word, thought upon thought.

And in these first two verses, for example, he brings at least three words together in order to describe the one and the same experience of the blessedness which lies at the heart of this experience that we speak of as forgiveness. The only other thing I want to say by way of introduction is this. No man can speak or write about forgiveness if he himself is not forgiven.

And so the person who is here expounding the theme of forgiveness is essentially a forgiven man. If you want to know what forgiveness is, you don't go to the professor in his professorial chair unless, of course, he is a forgiven professor. If you want to know what forgiveness is, you don't go to the scientist in his laboratory unless, of course, he is a forgiven sinner.

Neither, for that matter, do you go to the minister who occupies a pulpit unless he too is a forgiven sinner. It is only the man who has tasted and has seen for himself the greatness and the grace of God in his pardoning mercy. It is only the man that has drunk of the well that can really talk about this.

And so we turn to a man tonight who is much forgiven. He's forgiven much, and he loves much, and he sings so much. And it's all because he has tasted of the sweetness of this thing that bears the name forgiveness.

Now I want to look at this passage tonight, looking perhaps at three things in order. First of all, we must consider the blight of sin that makes forgiveness necessary. Secondly, at the bliss that pardon brings.

And then we shall consider how the boon is bestowed, and who does it, and how can we receive it. Now, first of all, we look at the blight of sin that makes forgiveness a necessity. The psalmist describes this hideous thing called sin.

He describes it in these first two verses from three points of view. You see, pardon is a necessity. But what makes pardon a necessity is the fact, the universal fact of human sin.

And so in order to portray human sin, the psalmist, as it were, takes his camera and he looks at the hideous thing from three different angles. It's the same thing, it's the same phenomenon, it's the same reality that he's describing, but he wants us to see it from at least three different angles. I don't know how you feel when you do a thing like this, but I tell you, for my part it's most humbling.

Because you see, I see here, not a reflection of you, but a reflection of myself. For this is a mirror that shows up the sin of every human heart. For whatever this man has to say about sin here, I believe that the Holy Spirit will tell you as he tells me, something of this is found in us, all of us, by nature.

Now let's look at it. First of all, says the psalmist, sin in its relation to God, sin is called transgression. Blessed, so he begins, blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven.

Now, what does he mean? The word that is here used in English, this word transgression, has in the Hebrew tongue the concept of a breakaway. If you want a picture, you can imagine a regiment of soldiers marching down the street outside and a soldier breaks out of rank and he runs away somewhere. Now that's the notion that we have in this word, transgression.

It's somebody breaking rank, tearing himself loose from a bondage that is legitimate. And so he is doing the illegitimate thing. It's a man in revolt.

It's a man who raises up a standard of revolt and says, I will not go the way I ought, I'll go my own way. And this of course is what sin is in the first place. It is the setting up of a standard of revolt against God.

It is a man saying, I'll go my own way, I'll think my own thoughts, I'll decide for myself what's right and what's wrong, and I'll simply go my own sweet way. You see, that's sin. Man was not made to go his own way, neither is he sustained from day to day and year to year to go his own way.

Man was made and man is sustained to go God's way. And when any man says, I go my own way, he is a sinner. And apart from the forgiveness of God, he's a lost sinner, for he's out of God's way.

That's what Isaiah meant when he said in that very remarkable chapter 53, all we like sheep have gone astray. We've turned every man to his own way, his own way of thinking, his own way of living. We have our own standards, we decide what we are going to do.

Men and women in Knox Church, Toronto, that is sin of the deepest dye. And whatever form it takes, it is the raising of a standard of rebellion against Almighty God, and that makes it the cardinal iniquity it is. That's the blight of sin photographed, as it were, from one particular angle.

Now come with me to the next. Viewed from the vantage point of the true end of life, that same deadly thing is now called sin. This is the name we usually use, this is the word we normally employ.

Sin. Did you notice what he says? Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Now, this word really conveys an entirely different thought.

Related, of course, it's describing the same basic thing, the same basic phenomenon, but it describes it really as a blunder. I am told, on the very highest authority, that the basic notion behind the Hebrew word here is that of a blunder. A vital, a terrifying mistake.

The biggest blunder of your life. Now, folk normally describe this blunder in terms of missing the mark. And, of course, they do so rightly, because this is the picture.

You have a target, and you're aiming an arrow, or you're going to shoot. And you're aiming at the bull's eye, and you miss it. And that's precisely what this word sin means.

What God meant us to do, we either come short, or we manage to miss it somehow or other. But we do not hit the bull's eye. We do not hit the target.

We miss it. We make a blunder, and we come short of the glory of God. I remember on one occasion making a pastoral call to a home.

I think they had some boys in from the neighborhood playing with their two boys in the garage which was on the side. Do you say garage in Canada now? Wait a minute. Well, you know what I mean.

And here they'd been playing, and when I arrived on the scene, they'd been playing a game of darts. I'm sure you play darts here. And I had a word with the boys as I was going into the house.

And I noticed they were taking the dart board down from the inside of the garage door. And to my great consternation, I could see a ring of marks all around the place where the board had been. And I thought to myself, well, does your father know what's going on here? But you see, it illustrates exactly the meaning of this word.

Every miss left a mark. David, Israel's king, looked back over his life. And he saw the marks he had left behind him.

Bathsheba, he saw her stained and marked. Uriah, her husband, murdered and slaughtered. Children in his own house.

He saw the stains and the marks and the consequences of his own sin upon them. You see, this is what sin does. It leaves a mark.

David speaks then of transgression, and he speaks of sin. And thirdly, photographed from the third angle, that same hideous phenomenon already called transgression and sin now appears, as David tells us, as iniquity. Listen to his words again.

Blessed is the man, he says, unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity. Now once again, this is a different concept of sin, but it's the same reality. It's the same thing.

What does this word mean? Scholars will divide. And when scholars divide, preachers must be very careful. One thing is quite clear.

It means this, it means guilt. It means that when I sin, I make myself liable to penalty. But there are certain scholars at any rate who insist that it means more than that.

I'm not going into the technicalities, the pulpit is not the place for that. And there are good reasons, I believe, for going beyond that and saying it also means this. It means that something that was once straight has become tangled.

We had an accident in London on the railway just a week or a fortnight ago. Quite a number of people were killed. And they tell me that the rails along which the train went were so warped and so twisted that you really couldn't recognize them for what they were.

Now that is what some scholars say this word means. Life was meant to be a straight thing, uncomplicated. It came out from the hand of God as something that was pure and uncomplicated and straight.

But sin has mixed it all up. It's become a tangled skein. It's become like a thread that's all mixed up.

You can make neither heads nor tails out of it. Let me put it to you like this. The significance of it is this, that man loves what he should hate and he hates what he should love.

He goes where he shouldn't and he doesn't go where he ought to go. Everything's wrong, everything's topsy-turvy. Life is so mixed up you can't make sense of it.

That's sin, that's iniquity. Transgression, sin, iniquity. The blight that makes pardon a necessity, the cause.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Will you allow me to say this with all the grace of my command? I don't know you good people, but make no bones about this. It doesn't matter what kind of clothes you wear.

It doesn't matter what kind of a college you may have passed through. It doesn't matter what title you bear. In the sight of God, you and I, we are both sinners.

Sin has marked us, we have rebelled, we have the marks of sin in ourselves and we have left the stain of our sin upon others. And we've got ourselves so mixed up that we can't live very long without a psychiatrist's help. And we dare not die without the help of God.

Now, I'm glad to be able to turn from there. If I had to stop there tonight, it would be a most sad thing for me. But it's the dark background, it's the back cloth against which the gospel of Jesus Christ has to be proclaimed.

The gospel is good news. But it is good news to a world that is dying because of sin and lost because of sin. Now come with me then to this wondrous message.

The blessing that makes forgiveness so exceedingly precious. Just as sin can be described from different points of view, so also can God's forgiveness. I'm reminded of a word of John Bunyan's when I come to this passage.

John Bunyan once put it like this. You know, his mind was so graphic and so pictorial. However gaping or deep the wound of sin, says he, the plaster of God's grace is able to cover it still.

Well said. The wound of sin may be deep. It may be a gash that is yearning.

And why? But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound and does. So that if sin is capable of being described in a threefold way, so is the pardoning mercy of God. And that is to what we come now.

Now look at it. I don't know whether you good people like to keep your eye on your Bibles. You do so if you'd like to.

Because you see, this is not my word tonight. This is all before you if you have a Bible in your hand. Now look at this.

God's mercy is first described here by this simple word, forgiveness. Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven. If you were to turn to a Hebrew Bible and come to this particular word, you would find that it's a very simple word which means in the first place to fix something up.

Now it's as simple as this. If I threw, I won't do it of course. But if I threw this hymn book there and it came and fell right in front of me, and one of you good people would come out to the pew and you would pick it up and you would carry it away.

That's exactly the word that we have here for forgiveness. Forgiveness means that God in Jesus Christ comes to take sin and to carry it out of the way. He in the person of his anointed son comes and he lays hold upon the hideous thing, takes it upon himself and with his mighty strength and overwhelming grace, he bears the wretched thing out of the way.

Now if you want this put in New Testament language, you have it in John chapter 1. Many of you will remember the day, that epochal day, when John the Baptist introduced our Lord Jesus Christ to his disciples. And he did so in these words. Do you remember, he said, look he said, all of you look, look he says, there he is, behold.

Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. And that's what this word forgiveness means. God's forgiveness implies that he comes and he lays hold upon the burden himself and he in the omnipotence of his strength carries it out of the way.

Oh how precious this is. Your sin and mine does not simply give us an ordinary burden or a heartache. Your sin and mine involves us in being under the curse and the judgment of a holy God.

But in the wonder of God's grace, he has come in his son to take it away.

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