

SONG: "It Is Well with My Soul"

<https://youtu.be/IOdzLzusekA>

SONG: "Rock of Ages"

https://youtu.be/gM7gt_cSxjw

The Bible repeatedly presents the two ways of life. Psalm 1 sets the theme with the contrast between "the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly" (vs. 1) and "the ungodly" (vs. 4). "Ungodly" pictures a person "who follows a life style contrary to the laws of God" (Livingston, *TWOT*, Vol. 2, p. 863). Eighty times the "ungodly" is antithetically portrayed against the righteous in the Bible. "The focus is on both the quality of lifestyle and the results of these two ways of living."

Girdlestone observed, "Rasha (רשע) is the word most generally rendered wicked. ... The word wicked is supposed by some etymologists to be connected with quick, and to mean lively;It is supposed originally to refer to the activity, the tossing, and the confusion in which the wicked live, and the perpetual agitation which they cause to others. Thus Isaiah says (Isaiah 57:20-21) 'The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt; there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked'" (*Old Testament Synonyms*, p. 81).

These two ways of life see everything differently. The wicked looks at life in the here and now with nothing beyond what he can see, touch, taste, smell, and hear. Peter described the wicked as "natural brute beasts" (2 Pet. 2:12). "Brute" simply is *alogos*, without the Word, reason, or logic. The righteous (the believer) sees the here-and-now but sees the hand of God in, around, above, and throughout everything. That reality lies behind Psalm 32, one of David's psalms of repentance, which Ryrie believed was "probably the sequel to Ps. 51, in which David confess his sin with Bath-sheba." David realized the situation in which he found himself was not merely a natural, or physical, situation but a spiritual situation. He described physical symptoms in verses 3-4 ("My bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.... My moisture is turned into the drought of summer," but he began the

psalm with a clear acknowledgment of the cause for his previous predicament: “transgression... sin.”

The psalm is called a “Maschil” in the superscription. While some would dismiss the superscriptions in the Psalms, we have no extant manuscripts that do not contain them (except some of the Dead Sea manuscripts—and they lack the first verse). The superscriptions appear in the Masoretic Text (MT) as well as the Septuagint Greek text (LXX), which sometimes alters the titles slightly. In the MT, the superscriptions are counted as the first verse, which throws off the numbering when compared to English translations, which did not include the superscriptions in the numbering. Kidner remarked, “The New Testament not only treats these headings as holy writ, but following our Lord’s example it is prepared to build its arguments on one or another of the notes of authorship which form part of them (Mk. 12:35-37; Acts 2:29ff., 34ff.; 13:35-37). We need look no further than this for their authentication” (*Psalms 1-72*, pps. 32-33). Kidner further observed that they were third-person editorial comments, “and are therefore later than the psalms themselves.” How much later we cannot know, but they are ancient.

This psalm is a “Maschil” (Ps. 32:1), a word that comes from a root meaning “insight” or “wisdom”; “so these psalms may be noted for their special instruction or their musical difficulty” (Wolf, *TWOT*, Vol. 2, pps. 877-878). Kidner noted that thirteen psalms have this in their title (Pss. 32, 42, 44-45, 52-55, 74, 78, 88-89, 142), observing the verb means “to make wise or prudent or to have success or skill. The LXX translates it ‘(a psalm) of understanding,’” (p. 38). If the meaning is “to make wise,” and I believe it is, Psalm 32 seeks to inform us of the reality beyond reality—that there is more to life than what our five senses can discern, and on which *only* God’s Word can inform us. Paul references this spiritual wisdom in 1 Corinthians 2: “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit ... But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned” (vss. 9-10, 14).

David went straight to the heart of the issue in verse 1: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” Note David used two different words for sin—“transgression” and “sin”—as well as two different words for the blessing to which he refers—“forgiven” and “covered.” “Blessed” translates a particular Hebrew word for “blessed” (there are two, *barak* and *ashar*). This word is never used of God. Hamilton noted it has the idea of “to be envied with desire” (*TWOT*, Vol. 1, p. 80). “*Barak* is a benediction, *ashar* more of a congratulation.” To be blessed (*ashar*) man “has to do something.” While that may seem like it commends a works salvation, it does not, for David later explains what he did: he confessed (vs. 5). God congratulates those who confess to Him.

Paraphrasing, David said, “To be envied with desire” is the person who is forgiven. Now consider the two words for sin, “transgression” and “sin.” “Transgression” is straightforward, outright rebellion and revolution. Girdlestone observed transgression is “crossing over the boundary of right and entering the forbidden.” “Sin” translates the more general term and the most common word for “coming short of that aim which God intended all his children to reach.” “Forgiven” pictures something being lifted up and carried away. “Covered” contains the idea of concealing or hiding.

Prior to his confession recorded in 2 Samuel 12:13 (and memorialized in Psalm 51 in which David used at least *five different* Hebrew words for sin), David had hidden his sin. Recall how he tried to manipulate Uriah in 2 Samuel 11, first recalling him to Jerusalem from battle at Rabbah-Ammon and then having his commander, Joab, place Uriah on the frontlines to have him killed (vss. 6-17). We hide our sin, too, by calling it by other names. We call it an error in judgment, a moment of weakness, a slip of the tongue, an indiscretion. It is the nature of sinful man to hide from holy God. What did Adam do when he sinned? First, he and Eve hid themselves (Gen. 3:8). Then he tried to push his sin off on God and Eve (vs. 12) by claiming it was the fault of the woman who God gave him. The Bible presents us as we are, not as we imagine ourselves to be. In Romans 1, Paul summarized the history of the response of all the world’s cultures and civilizations to sin as denying God’s

existence (if there is no God, there's no sin; if no sin, then no guilt) and creating idolatrous manmade religions that could be manipulated to dull awareness of sin. Twice in that passage, we read the words "God gave them up" (vss. 24, 26). Finally, "God gave them over" (vs. 28) "to a reprobate" (unfit, unreliable) "mind" (thinking or thought processes). This is the way of the unbeliever.

David expanded on the thought in Psalm 32:2: "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity; in whose spirit is no guile." In the typical manner of Hebrew poetic parallelism, this expands and goes beyond mere forgiveness and covering of transgression and sin. "Imputeth" is translated "count" twenty-three times in the King James. One of the primary meanings of the word is to "make a judgment" against another (Wood, *TWOT*, Vol. 1, p. 330). David said, Blessed is the man (the Hebrew word *Adam* in this case, reminding us we are made out of the dust of the earth) the LORD (Jehovah, the covenant God of Israel, whose covenant David's sin broke) does not charge with "iniquity," the normal word for being bent or crooked, perversity or twistedness. Girdlestone called it "the perversion or distortion of nature which is caused by evil-doing" (p. 78).

"In whose spirit is not guile" (Ps. 32:2) pictures honesty before God, taking responsibility for disobedience. We might compare the idea to "confess" in 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The Greek word there, *homologeō*, means to say the same thing as another, to agree with. Confession is saying the same thing as God about our sin, agreeing with Him. You can see that confession clearly in David's experience in Psalm 51. I noted earlier, David used five different words for sin there, each emphasizing a different dimension of his sin. He also used "I," "my," and "me" thirty-three times in only nineteen verses in Psalm 51. He owned his guilt.

David then explained what happened to him (and what happens to us) when we do not confess. "When I kept silence" (Ps. 32:3) describes the period David suffered the guilt of his sin. "My bones waxed old" pictures David's "deep unrest of mind and body" (Kidner, p. 133). The Hebrew conveys the idea of his body or essence being

consumed or wearing out. Kidner suggests we may see something similar in Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 11:30: "For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you." "Through my roaring all the day long" describes the misery David suffered. Gill pointed out that it was "not under a sense of sin, but under some severe affliction, and through impatience in it; not considering that sin lay at the bottom, and was the occasion of it; and such was the violence of the disorder, and his uneasiness under it, that his strength was dried up by it, and his bones stuck out as they do in aged persons, whose flesh is wasted away from them." David suffered physical symptoms as God's hand of judgment rested on him (compare the man at the Pool of Bethesda in John 5, to whom Jesus said after He healed him, "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee," vs. 14).

In retrospect, David realized the cause: "For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me" (Ps. 32:4). David later saw that his suffering was God's hand pressing down on him. "My moisture was turned into the drought of summer" graphically portrays how whatever disease David suffered was drying him up. Perhaps it was some kind of fever.

In verse 5 the fever breaks: "I acknowledged my sin unto thee." "Acknowledged" means to make something known. God already knew, of course, but David's confession to God and God's gracious response turned the tide. When we confess sin to God we're never telling Him something He does not already know. Note how many personal pronouns appear in verse 5: "I" (three times), "My sin," "mine iniquity," "my transgressions," and "my sin." David owned his sin. He spoke of "sin," "iniquity," and "transgressions" (plural). He said, "I will confess." What happened? "Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Notice that David now addressed God directly, "Thou." Prayer, real fellowship with God, is not possible with the awareness of sin (Ps. 66:18). "Forgavest" goes back to verse 1, "forgiveness," and translates a word that means to lift up and carry away.

God's forgiveness is beyond our full comprehension. My dad used to tell a story about a fellow deacon when discussing forgiveness. The man once pointed to a scar

on his hand and said, "A dog bit me here when I was boy. I forgave him, but I've never forgotten." Too often that is our idea of forgiveness. It is not God's. Psalm 103:12 says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." Micah promised, "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (7:19). How can God forgive? He sees sin covered by the blood of Jesus Christ, the perfect Sacrifice for sin. The debt was paid in full.

"Selah" (Psalm 32:5) appear seventy-one times in the Psalms and also three in Habakkuk 3:3, 9, 13, according to Patterson (*TWOT*, Vol. 2, p. 627). Scholars disagree as to its meaning. Some suggest it is a musical direction of some sort. Most think it conveys the idea of a pause, indicating a change of thought. I have always compared "Selah" to the signs railroad crossings used to have when I was a kid: "Stop, Look, And Listen." In the days before automatic lights and crossing gates, a simple X-shaped sign warned people that before continuing across the tracks, they needed to stop, look, and listen for approaching trains. It's a good concept for "Selah": Stop and think about this.

David then moved to apply what he learned (if "maschil" means to "make wise," he is passing on the wisdom) to "every one that is godly" (Ps. 32:6). "Godly" is set apart; it is sometimes translated "saint." Believers have been set apart. David urged believers to "pray" unto God "in a time when thou mayest be found." His experience should serve as an example to other believers and to us. Hebrews 4:16 explained, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." The idea is of turning to God while there is yet opportunity. Isaiah 55:6-7 stresses this: "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." The age of grace will one day come to an end. Life will one day end. Ecclesiastes warned, "Where the tree falleth, there it shall be" (11:3). Death settles eternal destinies.

David reemphasized the blessing of seeking the Lord: "Surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come night unto him" (Ps. 32:6). The idea, Gill pointed out, seems to "denote safety in the greatest calamities." The believer who seeks God is hidden in the cleft of the Rock of Christ. He has a solid foundation. Jesus said in Matthew 7:24-25: "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock."

David next turned directly to his Rock: "Thou art my hiding place" (Ps. 32:7). "Hiding place" translates a Hebrew word that has at its heart the ideas of concealment and concurrently protection. God Himself, "thou," is the believer's place of refuge and protection. Note that "art" is in italics, indicating it is not in the Hebrew text. David addressed God as *Thou, hiding place for me*. He went on to express his confident faith that "thou shalt preserve me from trouble." "Preserve" means to keep or guard. "Trouble" translates the normal word for tight or narrow, constricting spaces or distresses. Further, David said, God would "compass me about," or surround, enclose, or envelop him, "with songs of deliverance." "Deliverance" is escape. David expressed his faith that God Himself would be his hiding place, that He would guard David against the "intense inner turmoil" (Hartley, TWOT, Vol. 2, p. 779), and that He would surround David with songs of victory.

"Selah" (Ps. 32:7) calls us once more to pause and think. What a glorious outcome! Our God is the same God. His arm is not shortened. His care is not curtailed. He is still Sovereign. Our world sees the enemy as a mysterious, invisible virus that the experts know little about as is evident from their changing strategies. We know the real enemy is the prince of the power of the air. Luther put it simply in his great hymn, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*: "The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure; one little word shall fell him."

Verse 8-9 appear to be God's response to David's prayer of repentance: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." "Instruct" translates the verbal form of "Maskil" (vs. 1). God says He will give wisdom and point ("teach") David in the path he should take. That guidance would come through personal fellowship: "I will guide thee with mine eye." "Guide" is a word that means to "give counsel." God's counsel comes through fellowship with Him. We cannot see God's "eye" if we are not face to face with Him, which seems to portray intimate fellowship. We have all seen parents provide guidance to children with a look, good or bad. We have all seen well-trained dogs keeping eye contact with their masters, seeking direction. The slightest twitch can direct the dog in the direction the master chooses. It is that kind of loving attitude God explained that He would exercise toward David. Face to face. No words spoken. Just a look.

Verse 9 contrasts the sensitivity of direct fellowship with well-known examples to the contrary in the animal world. Horses tend to be skittish and excitable and will run away with an inexperienced unconfident rider. Mules, on the other hand, will not move without strong motivation. God warns us to avoid those extremes of excitable action and stubborn inaction. Those animals must be controlled strongly with "bit and bridle" or they will not conform to the desires of their masters.

In verse 10, David came back to the contrast in the two ways of life. "Many sorrows" pictures multiple pains that come to the unbeliever. Strongly contrasted to that is the life of the believer: "He that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about." "Trusteth" comes from a word that means to have confidence in and carries the idea of feeling safe. "Mercy" renders the word for God's steadfast, unchanging love. The picture is of the believer surrounded ("compass" is the same word used in verse 7 in which David spoke of being surrounded and enveloped by "songs of deliverance") by God's unchanging love. I envision a cloud of mercy, but that is not an adequate image. In John 10:28-29, Jesus spoke of believers' security: give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is great than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." We are in His Jesus' hands and the

Father's hands. What better place of security or safety could there be, whatever happens..

Practically, what response should we have to this? "Be glad in the LORD, O ye righteous." "Rejoice" is the meaning of the word translated "be glad." It pictures "being glad or joyful with the whole disposition" (Waltke, *TWOT*, Vol. 2, p. 879). Perhaps "be ecstatic" would be overstating the idea, but not by much. David doubled his call to celebration with the word "rejoice." That word, coming from a root meaning to circle around or "circle in joy," "is more applicable to vigorous, enthusiastic expressions of joy" (Lewis, *TWOT*, Vol. 1, p. 159). The call to worship explodes with the next phrase, "Shout for joy." "Give a ringing cry," all who are straight or believers who have been made straight, justified (Rom. 5:1).

Salvation, forgiveness, protection, mercies—all from the hand of the Father. The world sees merely the externals of a pandemic. In 2 Samuel 24, a plague came on Israel because of David's sin of taking a census. David went to Araunah "to buy the threshingfloor ... to build an altar unto the LORD, that the plague may be stayed from the people. ... David built there an altar... the LORD was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel" (vss. 21, 25). Recall how severe the plague was? Verse 15 tells us, "There died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men." The total number of men was 1,300,000 (vs. 9). That's about 6% of the population, all male, dead. All this occurred "from the morning even to the time appointed." How long was that? Some suggest three days, until it reached Jerusalem. Do you think social distancing and hand sanitizer would have stopped it? Or hydroxychloroquine? Data for Covid-19 infections and deaths in the United States seem to be coming in at less than half the initial estimates. Could it be God responded to the heartfelt prayers of His people for mercy? There is more than the human eye can see. Keep praying and trusting.

Song: "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"

<https://youtu.be/V9uGNb8Zfic>