I will teach you in the way you should go – Psalm 32

Introduction

The last two verses of Psalm 32 form a good introduction. They contain the familiar contrast between "the wicked" (v. 10) and "the righteous" (v. 11) – the believer and the unbeliever – the unbeliever experiencing "***sorrows"*** and the believer who can ***"be glad and rejoice … and shout for joy"***. It is made clear that the grounds of our joy are that God's, ***"steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord."*** So our joy is in God's love and because of this love there is a clear promise of God's guidance for the future (v. 9-10).

But this guidance is dependent on the state of our relationship with God. And this relationship – this state of "blessedness" is not dependent on the quality of our obedience to the Law of God, but on the fact that our sins have been forgiven! So this Psalm covers 3 themes:

1. Verses 1-5 speak of **the wonder of God's forgiveness**.
2. Verses 6 and 7 speak of **God's mercy as a *"hiding place"***.
3. Verses 8-10 speak of **the journey we are to take and the guidance of God**.

1. The wonder of God's forgiveness – we need a lot of forgiveness!

This is a song of joy. It starts with ***"blessed"*** and ends with, ***"be glad in the Lord, rejoice … shout for joy…."***

One of the main reasons for David's joy is that God has forgiven him for something he ought not to have done. He accepted full responsibility for his actions and his thoughts and he knows God has completely forgiven him. There is nothing like forgiveness for making the heart sing!

Augustine loved this Psalm. Remember his reprobate early life and his conversion. He lived his life in the full enjoyment of that forgiveness.

Remember the woman who anointed Jesus in the presence of the Pharisee in whose house the incident occurred. He expressed a high degree of disapproval of her actions, but the Lord Jesus said, ***"Her sins which are many are forgiven for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven the same person loves little."*** (Lk. 7:47)

If we are forgiven much, we will love much. Those who love much show it in their lives.

- **The four types of sin in our lives**

The ordinary person tends to think sins such as killing, living immorally, being corrupt in business and in courts of law are serious sins. He may know that the Bible condemns pride, jealousy, greed and lack of faith, but he doesn't think of these as bad sins. **But he is wrong!** Sins like pride, jealousy and greed are the roots from which other sins spring. The roots are as important as the fruits!

Because we fail to understand the seriousness of sin, we greatly underestimate the immensity of God's forgiveness. We tend to think we are not so bad and so God doesn't have to forgive us very much. The result of this is that we don't love God very much! This is extremely dangerous! Why? We are denying God the right to be God! We are making ourselves more important than He is!

There is no one on earth who is not guilty of these sins on a continuing basis. We desperately need to be forgiven and have these sins "covered". This Psalm speaks of transgressions, sin, iniquity and deceit.

- **Transgression:** God outlines the limits of human behaviour. Staying within these limits will be good for us, for our society and for our culture. But we all find these limits intolerable and we decide to cross them. So when we step outside the God-given limits, we transgress. It is not only murder, but things like jealousy, selfishness or even a desire for independence from God's rules. All these need to be forgiven. ***"Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven."*** (v. 1)
- **Sin** can be defined as not doing what we ought to do. The Holy Spirit tells us in His quiet way that we should do something, go and speak to someone, phone someone, but we don't do it. There are many stories in the press in England concerning women being attacked in a crowded street and no one going to help. The prevailing attitude is 'don't get involved; I might get hurt as well.' So sin is failing to do what you ought to have done. All our sins need to be forgiven (covered) as well.
- **Iniquity** is an inbuilt capability that perverts what is right and makes it into something wrong. For example, people promise great things in the name of "freedom" or "peace". But what they really intend is a form of totalitarianism – a loss of freedom and peace! Another example is giving to charity. Some 'charities' are good and legitimate, but they make promises about how much good the money given to them will accomplish. In fact most of the money is stolen by those running the charity. This is iniquitous.
- **Guile or hypocrisy/deceit:** this is projecting an attitude you don't feel. It is 'play acting'. As believers we often do this. We sing great hymns of praise to God, but in our hearts we are not worshipping. We promise things we have no intention of doing. We are skilled at telling half-truths. We have a spirit of deceit!

  Martin Luther had what he called "the Pauline Psalms" meaning the Psalms that Paul quoted. Psalm 32 is one of them. It is quoted by Paul in Romans 4:5-8, ***"However, to the man who does not work, but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:***

  Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.
  Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."

Covered – out of sight – out of remembrance. Real forgiveness forgets. Perhaps only God can really cover up our sins so effectively that they will be never thought of again by Him! We might remember, but not God! All our sins are charged to the account of the Lord Jesus. He accepts full responsibility for them!

- **The consequences of unconfessed sin** (v. 3-4)

David uses graphic phrases, ***" … when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long … my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer."***

Guilt and conviction are the cause of spiritual dryness and depression. David was depressed, weak and thoroughly upset. The longer he "kept silent", the worse it got. Eventually he came to the point of "acknowledging" and "confessing" his sins.

But once confession has been made and forgiveness received, we are not free to go on as before. Remember what the Lord Jesus said to the woman who had committed adultery. He didn't say, "Okay, forget it." He said, ***"Go, and sin no more."*** (Jn. 8:11)

2. God's mercy is a *"hiding place"* (v. 7)

What happens to people surrounded by God's love? Well they are not edgy or suspicious of the motives of others. They are merciful to others. The forgiven are great forgivers! Bitterness and harshness don't belong in a forgiven heart. Love, joy and forgiveness flourish there. You learn how to forgive your leaders, your team that fail to meet your expectations, your husband/wife or your naughty son who disgraced you. How? God has forgiven you, hasn't He?

Verses 6 and 7 speak of God's **deliverance** and **preservation** in the journey of life. Long before the term psychosomatic medicine was invented it was described in the Bible – here in verses 3 and 4. There is wonderful deliverance from these psychosomatic symptoms. Frank confession is a necessary condition of forgiveness. Our joy is in God's love!

3. The journey we are to take and the guidance of God

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you with my eye upon you." (v. 8)

Especially in difficult times, there is possibly no subject that intimately touches all believers as much as this subject – the need for guidance. So much depends on making the right choices, the right decisions.

- **The promise of God's guidance in our journey through life**

Three things about God's guidance:

- God is **able** to guide us. After all, He is God. He is Great and Almighty and because of this He is well able to guide you. Psalm 73: 24 says, ***"You guide me with your counsel and afterwards You will receive me to glory."*** In all the very difficult decisions you have to make God says, ***"I will guide you with My eye."***
- God is **willing** to guide us. It is possible for God to be able to guide us but to be unwilling to guide us – hence the need for the forgiveness of our sins. Proverbs 3:5-6 puts it very well, ***"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight."***

  So as you are faced with many big decisions concerning your work, your safety, your family, your finances etc. the Lord is not only **able** to show you what to do; but He is also very **willing** to show you what to do for He says, ***"I will guide you with My eye."***
- God is **longing** to guide us! The fact that He promises to guide us assures us of His great desire to do so. He is eager to be our guide! Why? He has a perfect plan for us and He doesn't want us to make a mistake. When the Lord Jesus appeared to Paul on the Damascus Road, he was told, ***"Arise and enter the city and you will be told what to do."*** (Acts 9:6) So there is the promise of God's guidance throughout our lives. He is **able** and **willing** and **longing** to guide every one of us. We are His dear children. [See Jer. 1:6 and Eph. 2:10]

- **The nature of God's guidance**

What kind of guidance does God promise and in fact give to us?

- **It is God-given guidance.** The keyword is "I". It is really wonderful that our infallible God, whose ways are always perfect, offers to guide us. He never makes a mistake. He is infinite wisdom. He never errs in His judgement or in anything that He does. It is very foolish to question the fact or the wisdom of God's guidance after we have received it!
- **It is individual guidance.** The fourth word in the sentence about guidance is "you" and this is a comfort. It occurs 3 times in verse 8. Look at Acts 9: 6 and notice the "me", "him" and "you". The Lord is ready, able, willing and eager to guide everybody, but it is individual guidance that He gives.
- **It is practical guidance.** It is guidance that is comprehensive and down-to-earth. The Lord says He will guide us, ***"With My eye upon you"***. So He is ever watching over us and at every phase of our lives He wants to guide us and He waits to guide us.

- **The condition of God's guidance**

Guidance is not automatic neither are we robots pushed around at another's will. What does God mean when He says, ***"I will counsel you with My eye upon you"*** ? Perhaps the picture here is of a master/boss looking towards his servant/employee with a look/expression which is able to encourage and direct or even a shake of the head indicating a "no". So what are the conditions of guidance?

- **There must be a humble mind.** There must be a recognition that we need guidance, ***"He leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble His way.***" (Ps. 25:9)
  "I know, Lord, that the way of man is not in himself; that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps." (Jer. 10:23) So to ask for guidance implies that we don't know the way and we have come humbly to ask for directions in the choices that have to be made. Our attitude must be, "I am trusting You to guide me. You alone will lead me".
- **There must be a watchful "eye"** – watching God's "eye". We do this in 2 ways:
  - ✓ **By following carefully the guidance He gives us in His Word**
    As you know, in the Bible God gives us clear guidance through the principles He has laid down. Some examples are: marriage (2 Cor. 6:14); questionable things (Rom. 14:1-17); meeting regularly together (Heb. 10:25).
  - ✓ **By following carefully the guidance He gives us by His Spirit**

    "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go." (Ps. 32:8)

    "Now angel of the Lord said to Philip, rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." Philip obeyed and met the Ethiopian eunuch.

    Paul, ***"Having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia … attempted to go to Bithynia. But the Spirit of Jesus did not allow him"***. (Acts 16:6-7)

  This calls for a careful and prayerful daily walk with the Lord.
- **There must be a surrendered will** – it is a waste of time to "watch for His eye" unless we are willing to do what He tells us to do. Psalm 32:9 tells us not to be impetuous like a racehorse or

stubborn like a mule. We must walk humbly before God watching and waiting for Him to guide us and fully yielding ourselves to Him in readiness to do whatever He wants us to do.

- **A summary of practical points**

  - We need to **listen** to God (v. 8). He speaks to us through His Word. We need to echo Samuel's response in 1 Sam. 3:10, ***"Speak for Your servant hears."***
  - We need to **learn** from God. The Lord Jesus said, ***"Learn of me."*** (Mt. 11:28-30). The Lord Jesus is our teacher and our example!
  - We need to **keep looking** to God, ***"Behold, as the eyes of a servant look to the hand of their master … so our eyes look to the Lord God …."*** (Ps. 123:2) God does this by His Spirit quietly prompting us.
  - We are not to be impulsive like a horse. Peter was impulsive when he drew his sword at the arrest of the Lord Jesus. (Jn. 18:10-11)
  - We are not to be obstinate like a mule – like Jonah was when he ran away from doing God's will. (Jonah 1:1-3)
  - If we are like "a horse" or "a mule", we will experience God's "bit and bridle" and come under the discipline of our Heavenly Father. This may cause us to experience some of the sorrows of v. 10, v. 3 and v. 4. (Read Heb. 12:5-13)
  - **The benefits of the Lord's guidance**

    "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." (Col. 3:3)

    So we are safe – absolutely safe in God's keeping for time and eternity.

The Lord's joy is within us. Verse 11 is a verse of victory. The happiest place in all the world to be is in the very centre of God's will, seeking to do those things that are pleasing to Him. Look at Rom. 12:2 – ***"What is good, and acceptable and perfect."***

What a marvellous thing it is that, if we really belong to the Lord Jesus, our journey through life is planned by the Lord Himself.

- He gives us clear instructions for every step of the way.
- He warns us of dangers.
- He guards us from them and uses them for our blessing.
- He gladdens us in our hearts.

"Wherever He may guide me,
No want shall turn me back.
My Shepherd is beside me,
And nothing can I lack.
His wisdom ever waketh.
His sight is never dim.
He knows the way He taketh
and I will walk with Him."