

Psalms 32:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Analysis

This opening beatitude of Psalm 32 announces one of Scripture's most profound spiritual truths: the supreme blessedness of forgiveness. The Hebrew **ashre** (blessed/happy) introduces a double blessing statement, emphasizing completeness and certainty. Unlike worldly happiness based on circumstances, this blessedness flows from spiritual reality—sins dealt with, guilt removed, relationship with God restored.

The phrase '**transgression is forgiven**' uses pesha for transgression (willful rebellion, conscious violation) and nasa for forgiven (literally 'lifted,' 'carried away,' 'borne'). God doesn't minimize or overlook sin but actively removes it, carrying it away from the sinner. Isaiah 53:4-5 prophetically applies this language to Messiah who would bear our transgressions. The passive construction ('is forgiven') emphasizes divine action—God forgives; humans cannot self-forgive.

The parallel phrase '**whose sin is covered**' uses chata'ah (sin, missing the mark) and kasah (covered, concealed). This doesn't mean hiding undealt-with sin but divine covering through atonement. The Day of Atonement's sacrificial blood 'covered' Israel's sins (Leviticus 16). Christ's blood provides final, complete covering (1 Peter 4:8, Hebrews 10:4-10). Where sin once stood exposed, God's grace covers, so divine justice sees only Christ's righteousness.

Paul quotes this verse in Romans 4:7-8 as Abraham's testimony, demonstrating justification by faith precedes the Mosaic law. The gospel's center is here:

forgiveness and covering—not human achievement but divine gift received through faith. Every believer's supreme joy is this—sins forgiven, guilt covered, acceptance secured not by works but by grace.

Historical Context

Psalm 32 is traditionally attributed to David, with many linking it to his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah (2 Samuel 11-12). The superscription identifies it as a Maschil (instruction/contemplation), suggesting didactic purpose—teaching from painful personal experience. David's months of unconfessed sin brought physical, emotional, and spiritual deterioration (v.3-4), until Nathan's confrontation produced genuine repentance (2 Samuel 12:13).

This psalm is one of seven 'Penitential Psalms' (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) used throughout church history for confession and repentance. The early church read these during Lent; medieval Catholicism prescribed them for confession rituals. Yet the psalm's emphasis is not perpetual guilt but the blessedness of forgiveness—moving from burden to liberation, from hiding to honesty, from guilt to joy.

Ancient Near Eastern religions typically viewed sin as ritual pollution requiring ceremonies but lacking the deep moral and relational dimensions of biblical repentance. Israel's prophets emphasized that mere ritual without heart change was worthless (Isaiah 1:11-17, Micah 6:6-8). This psalm reflects mature theology—sin offends God personally, requires genuine confession, and produces authentic joy when forgiveness is received.

The Reformation particularly emphasized this psalm's doctrine of justification by faith apart from works. Luther called it a 'Pauline Psalm,' recognizing its gospel clarity. Calvin noted how it opposes Roman Catholic penance systems that prescribed works for forgiveness. The psalm's testimony—blessedness through divine forgiveness, not human merit—became a battle cry for gospel truth.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does the psalm's emphasis on blessedness rather than condemnation challenge performance-based approaches to Christianity?
2. What is the difference between sin being 'forgiven' (lifted/carried away) and 'covered,' and how do both apply to Christian salvation?
3. In what ways did Christ fulfill the role of sin-bearer implied in this verse, and how does His work secure our forgiveness?
4. How does Paul's use of this verse in Romans 4 demonstrate that justification by faith predates the Mosaic law?
5. What practical difference should the reality of forgiveness make in daily Christian life—how does blessedness transform behavior and perspective?

Interlinear Text

אַשֶׁר	נִשְׁוִי	כִּי שֵׁעַ	כִּסּוּי	חַטָּאָה:
Blessed	is forgiven	is he whose transgression	is covered	whose sin
H835	H5375	H6588	H3680	H2401

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 44:22 (Sin): I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.

Psalms 85:2 (Sin): Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah.

Isaiah 43:25 (Sin): I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.

Revelation 22:14 (Blessing): Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

Isaiah 1:18 (Sin): Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Psalms 40:4 (Blessing): Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.

Psalms 106:3 (Blessing): Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times.

Luke 11:28 (Blessing): But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.

Psalms 53:1 (Sin): The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good.

Psalms 42:1 (Parallel theme): As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.