

Blessed Is the One... Whose Sin Is Covered

22 February • Monday of the Second Week in Lent

Psalm 32

- ¹Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.
- ²Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
- ³For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
- ⁴For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah
- ⁵I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD",
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah
- ⁶Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.
- ⁷You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. Selah
- ⁸I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.
- ⁹Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
which must be curbed with bit and bridle,
or it will not stay near you.
- ¹⁰Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.
- ¹¹Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

Meditation

The psalm reminds us that all of us have sinned. None

of us are immune from this iniquity. Sometimes in our own life's journey we feel like a failure or inadequate, or maybe even the opposite. We may risk becoming like the Pharisees judging others, and drawing opinions or views of others whom we feel have fallen short. The fact is that all of us have sinned. All of us have fallen short, not once but several times in life.

Yet in our iniquity we can draw hope in Christ alone. He has both paid our ransom in full and provides us a pathway to the Father's house. Christ waits at the doorway of our hearts for us to acknowledge our shortfalls, and like the Father seeing His forlorn prodigal in the distance, runs to cloak and embrace us with a kiss of welcome. All starts with a simple "I'm sorry..." In the depth of our silence and conscience, we repent in our hearts. The invitation awaits us. We must take heed and trust in the steadfast love of Christ. God's forgiveness restores us into fellowship with Him, replacing our guilt with joy.

I have recently been diagnosed with cancer. Yet I continue to see God's hand and favour in my life. I consider myself immensely blessed. I am at this time reminded that all things work together for good to them who love God, to them that are called according to His purpose. I'm sure that good things can come from even challenging and demanding times in our lives. God is faithful at all times, even when we think He is hiding Himself from us. I believe that when God wants to bless us He reveals Himself to us. But when He wants us to grow, He sometimes hides Himself from us so that we might lean more on Him.

I know too that there is always a cost to follow Christ

and the price doesn't always come in the places we expect. The battle is fought in the heavenlies.

This passage provides assurance for us to trust in the steadfast love of God who gives life. I can be glad and rejoice despite my condition.

Prayer

Blessed are You oh eternal and loving God.
That You would choose to dwell amongst us.
Even through Your silence You give us hope.
May we who shelter under Your wing and be restored
to Your Son.
Amen.

Action

In silence, pause and bring your concerns before Christ for Him to wash and cleanse you through His blood - burdens of doubt, distraction, disappointment, delay, division, displeasure within you.

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Come... Let Us Reason Together

23 February • Tuesday of the Second Week in Lent

Isaiah 1:16-20

- ¹⁶Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
¹⁷ learn to do good;
seek justice,
correct oppression;
bring justice to the fatherless,
plead the widow's cause.
¹⁸"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.
¹⁹If you are willing and obedient,
you shall eat the good of the land;
²⁰but if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be eaten by the sword;
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Meditation

What do we do with a serial adulterer? How can we deal with a repeat offender? What do we do with a recalcitrant sinner?

In one of my conversations with a man who had been in and out of prison, I told him that the church and I will always be there for him - no matter how many times he was sent to jail for his crimes. He was visibly struck.

Isaiah is about God's recalcitrant people, Israel, in the Old Testament. She was repeatedly two-timing with God. She cheated on God. She substituted the worship of the living God for the idolatry of dead idols - thinking that these tangible man-made images would deliver better life than God.

So, God's people chose evil over good. They preferred injustice over justice. They oppressed the poor and favoured the rich. The most empowered discriminated against the most powerless in their society - the orphans, widows and foreigners.

In short, they sinned big time in their hearts and heartland, in their personal and national affairs. The most frightening thing was that they did not think twice about living such worldly lives with no love for their neighbour.

There is only one thing more dangerous than sin in our hearts. It is our blindness to see, confess and repent from sin. And our self-righteousness to justify the deviousness of our hearts and the darkness of our motives. Israel perfected the art of temple-going while two-timing with God.

Isaiah 1 begins with God's people living in abject spiritual and moral decay. Isaiah 66 ends with new Israel in renewed worship of God. How did this spiritual renewal take place? There was promise of Suffering Servant who would bring about a new temple and new worship. The New Testament tells us that Jesus is the fulfilment of the new temple and worship (John 2).

Only Jesus can take us from a life of serial sinning to a life of serial holiness. Any other way - from superficial

church going, active church ministry, Bible reading regimes to skills training – will not bring about a love for God and a hatred for sin.

Prayer

Spirit of God, open our eyes to see the dark and desperate state we are in. We are all repeat offenders in our anger, envy, gossip, slander, false witness, lust and pride of life. Teach us to confess sin and repent of sin by humbly accepting Jesus as our only answer to moral decay.

Action

Do not substitute church going and ministry for following Christ.

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The Believing or Unbelieving Disciple

24 February • Wednesday of the Second Week in Lent

John 6:60-71

⁶⁰When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" ⁶¹But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offence at this? ⁶²Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) ⁶⁵And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

⁶⁶After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. ⁶⁷So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." ⁷⁰Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil." ⁷¹He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him.

Meditation

We face a constant battle between darkness and light. Every day we encounter tough decisions in life whether to be the light or hide the light. A fundamental attribute that distinguishes a true disciple from a fake is one who believes in Him. Jesus knew from the beginning those who did not believe and who would betray Him. Sometimes when we face difficult situations, unbelief

creeps in and we tend to drift away.

The question that lingers in this passage is, “Can someone be a disciple of Jesus and follow His teachings and not believe?” the answer is “Yes”, according to Jesus. Many disciples followed Him because of His teachings and miracles but they did not believe in Him. They were not willing to commit to a personal relationship.

The word “believe” in this verse, is the verb *pisteuo* derived from the noun *pistis* meaning “faith, assurance, belief”. But a verb is an action word. The usage of the word *pisteou* means “commit unto, commit to (one’s) trust, be committed unto, be put in trust with, be committed to one’s trust.”

Many times we see some who want the teachings, miracles, fellowship but are not willing to believe in Jesus by committing their lives.

The question that most ask is what to believe? Do you believe that Jesus is God in human form? Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins, for which you deserve eternal separation from God? Do you believe that the sacrifice of Jesus, is the only adequate payment for your sins?

I was born into a Christian family. I would go to Church, get involved in Youth and other ministries but I never committed my life to Jesus. It was only when I became a young adult that I started believing in Jesus and I became a true disciple. When I started believing in Jesus, I saw my life transformed and I became committed to obeying His word and spreading the Light of Christ to the world.

If you believe then make a personal commitment to a relationship with Jesus today. It is not enough just to know about Jesus, He wants us to believe Him.

Prayer

Father in the name of Jesus, help me to believe You and to be a light to people in darkness.

Action

I will commit to reading the Word and living the Word as I keep believing Jesus.

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Lift Us Up Into the Greatness of God

25 February • Thursday of the Second Week in Lent

John 3:1-15

¹Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ²This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." ³Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" ⁵Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' ⁸The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

⁹Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

Meditation

One of the problems of modern life that afflicts mankind and the church is the lost treasure of reflection. The

pace of today's world can be likened to the rapids of a mighty river, which streamlines its occupants along its determined path. The result is a populace that ends up living by a "going with the flow" mentality. This not only affects the way one lives but it also affects the way one thinks. Perhaps we can see Nicodemus as one who falls into this category.

When Jesus told him that a man must be "born again" in order to see the kingdom of God he responded with a narrow-minded response. So narrow that he could only envision a person going into his mother's womb again in order to be reborn. Let's not be too harsh on Nicodemus before taking a good look at ourselves. Do we respond by limiting God based on our programmed "narrow-minded" view? Truthfully, the majority of the church is not different from Nicodemus.

So then what is the solution? Why not start by doing something simple like David did in his early years? Step out and ponder the night sky and get lost in the creative genius of God. Take your Bible and go to a park or remote area with an expectation that God will speak to you. The more you meditate on the beauty of His creation, the more you will understand David's response when he said, "Lord what is man, that thou art mindful of Him?" (Ps 8:3-4) In this beautiful season of Lent, be intentional in your devotional time with God. Take the initiative to step aside from the pulsating current of life and get lost in the greatness of God; come out of the narrowness of self and allow the Spirit to take you to higher heights. Take time to allow the Lord to speak of your "Born Again" reality that was accomplished at the Cross.

Prayer

Dear God, as we think upon Your majesty and glory, we can only marvel and be humbled that You would think upon people such as us. May we learn the blessings of thoughtful reflection so that our faith and capacities would be enlarged! Forgive us Lord for the times when we limit You by our narrow-mindedness in always trying to figure out how You will answer prayer. We ask that during this time of renewal that we would think upon Your sacrificial gift to man; to pause and give thanks for all that You have done. Help us Lord to know the reality of Isaiah 55:8-9 (KJV) “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Action

Be intentional each and every day to make time for contemplative thought and reflection. One of the most beautiful gifts that God has given to man is the ability to think and meditate. Do not let the fast paced current of this life strip and rob you of this most precious treasure.

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Ascribe to the LORD

26 February • Friday of the Second Week in Lent

Psalm 29

- ¹Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- ²Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
worship the LORD in the splendour of holiness.
- ³The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD, over many waters.
- ⁴The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.
- ⁵The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.
- ⁶He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf,
and Sirion like a young wild ox.
- ⁷The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.
- ⁸The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
- ⁹The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth
and strips the forests bare,
and in his temple all cry, "Glory!"
- ¹⁰The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king for ever.
- ¹¹May the LORD give strength to his people!
May the LORD bless his people with peace!

Meditation

Worship is a declaration of allegiance and an act of submission to the Almighty God. It is also the participation of communion with our Creator and Sustainer. Psalm 29 is a wonderful psalm that invites the worshipper to do exactly that. When the worshipper is ready to listen, he/she first hears a call to heavenly

beings to give to the LORD God worship that is due His name. In response to the call, we hear the heavenly beings declare loudly that the Lord God is full of glory, full of strength, and full of splendid holiness (vv1-2).

But these declarations by the angelic beings soon give way to a different utterance. Instead of their loud testimonies, now we hear the terrifying, thundering voice of God Himself bellowing over His creation. The voice of God is heard roaring loudly over the waters, over the forests, over the meadows, over the wilderness, and over the floods. In crafting the psalm, the psalmist repeats the phrase “the voice of God” 12 times. Each time the phrase is used, its effect on creation is noted and another facet of understanding God is added. Through the piercing and commanding roar of the Almighty’s thundering voice, worshippers are brought to the wonderful realisation of the God they worship. The Lord God’s lordship extends over the peril of flood, over the economic might and pride of strong nations, over the chaos of lost dangers raging fires, over the desolation of the desert (vv2-10).

Interestingly, the final word in the psalm shifts from the thunder of Almighty God’s voice to a prayer for blessing for God’s worshippers. The prayer asks for strength for God’s people as they journey through the ups and downs of life. It also asks for the blessing of shalom upon them. May God’s people dwell in peace, wholeness, wellness, safety, and rest (v11).

What a privilege to be a worshipper of God and to be in intimate relationship with Him. Amidst all the noise of life, God’s final word to His people are not words which inspire fear, but words which inspire trust. May this be encouragement for us all the time.

Prayer

Dear Lord, in times of fear and discouragement, remind us of Your greatness and goodness. You are the Almighty King worthy of praise and adoration. And as we worship You, grow in our hearts a deepening consciousness of the richness of Your grace and mercy in our lives. May this be true in our experience of You. Amen.

Action

No matter what circumstances we face in life, may we always remember that we worship and serve a big and mighty God. May we always seek His favour and discover His goodness and greatness for ourselves.

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He Restores My Soul

27 February • Saturday of the Second Week in Lent

Psalm 23

¹The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.

³ He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for ever.

Meditation

Henry Ward Beecher wrote that King David left no sweeter psalm than this psalm. No matter how familiar Psalm 23 is to many, it cannot fail to comfort. In the midst of all the turmoil of life, when we are faced with troubles from small irritations to crises that threaten to overwhelm us, Psalm 23 states emphatically that God is our Shepherd and that He will look after us. Scheming and mocking enemies do not faze us; God will bless us

in front of them. Even when death looms, we walk in God's presence.

This psalm stresses that, no matter what may happen to us, God does not abandon us. He will take care of us. When we are weak, God strengthens us and revives us. When we are low spiritually or feel far from God, He gives grace. But beyond comforting us in the present time, God prepares us for eternal life. He restores our soul beyond a mere fortification of the inner person to lead us in righteousness to dwell with Him forever. One key word here is 'lead'. God does not compel us. He leads us, but we have to follow. Many people miss out on God's comfort and grace because they absolutely refuse to follow Him. An agnostic once confessed to me that he accepted that Christians who believe in a personal God draw on deeper resources in times of adversity and hardship. Still he refused to be a Bible-believing Christian because he thought it was braver of him to doubt and question the reliability of the Bible. Psalm 23 speaks to the Shepherd's flock. Restoration, righteousness, comfort, anointing, eternal life - these all flow from the Shepherd. How well are you following Him?

Prayer

O Shepherd of my soul, help me to cling to You. Help me to put my trust in You. Increase my faith and give me strength to follow in Your ways, to keep Your commandments, and to love You more.

Action

Consider if there is some area in your life that you have not surrendered to God, some sins that you still cling

to out of pleasure, habit or addiction. Ask God for strength, and determine now to surrender all to God.

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Come to the Waters

28 February • Third Sunday in Lent

Isaiah 55:1-9

- ¹“Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
- ²Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
- ³Incline your ear, and come to me;
hear, that your soul may live;
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.
- ⁴Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.
- ⁵Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know,
and a nation that did not know you shall run to you,
because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.
- ⁶“Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;
- ⁷let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
- ⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.
- ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Meditation

The invitation is to those who are thirsty and who do not have money. Do we realise how lacking we are in what we basically need, which is closeness to God? Do we realise how futile it is to have money? Money can buy but cannot satisfy and we are exhorted to listen to God who gives what is good. God knows because God created us in God's image. We are to grow into who God wants us to be, not what we think we should be.

This passage was written at a time when the Israelites were in exile, yet God never lost hope in what God can still do. In our worst moments, when we least expect help, God reaches out to us. We only need to be conscious of such a reaching out to us in our thirst and in our money-bound culture. Our soul may still live, but it is living a life in God's love, not in what money can buy and in spite of having our thirst satiated by what the world provides.

God did this to David: though he sinned, God made him a witness, a leader and a commander. So too God can make us greater than we can imagine for God has glorified us. Let us seek God while He may be found and call on Him when God is near. Let us repent and return for God will pardon and create a new heart within us as God did with David (see Psalm 51 which David composed after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba). God's thoughts are not ours, which are full of despair and destruction. God's thoughts are of life in God's presence as we lift up our eyes to the heavens.

As we cannot see into the heavens, so we cannot conceive of God's ways which are higher than our ways. God's thoughts are higher and greater than ours. Too often our thoughts are only of this earth: we look down, not up. We need to look inwards, and not outwards. God

is closer to us than we think, closer than even our own heartbeat. Praise God for being so close to us and so loving to us at all times!

Prayer

Thank You God for being able to satisfy us fully. Let us enjoy Your presence and Your fullness of joy in the midst of a thirsty and money-filled world. Open our eyes that we may see how great and yet how close You are to us. Give us Your eyes which sees us as we really are, and Your love which crosses all barriers beyond You and us, the barriers set up by our own pride and the pride and selfishness of others too. Draw us near to You through Your forgiving love which is greater than any trespass that we commit against You, knowingly or unknowingly. Truly You are a compassionate God, wanting to satisfy us with Your presence and Your companionship in our journey through life. We thank You for this period of Lent when we remember how Jesus turned to You and Your presence did sustain Him in His journey to the cross. As You have done before, to David and to Jesus, do so to us also. Thank You God.

Action

Commit every thought and action to God that God may remove our false sense of fullness. See yourself as God sees you, not as others or how you see yourself. Acknowledge that we are truly bankrupt, hungry and thirsty. Ask God to give you living water and the bread which is the body of Jesus Himself. Live each day in what which God gives you secretly and inwardly.

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