

Transgression Forgiven

by H. A. Ironside

"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" (Psalm 32:1, 2).

THOSE who read the Bible with any degree of care, notice that when the apostle Paul quotes from the thirty-second Psalm in the fourth chapter of Romans, showing the great doctrine of justification by faith, it is in perfect accord with the revelation given in the Old Testament. He cites Abraham's case first, a man of whom it was written, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness," and then says, "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered." So then, the thirty-second Psalm may well be called, as Luther said, a Pauline Psalm. It is in exact accord with the truth set forth in the Epistle to the Romans.

This Psalm is a wonderful record of redeeming grace, and is David's own experience. He is telling how he has been brought into the knowledge of the blessedness of transgression forgiven and sin covered.

You will notice that in the first two verses we have four distinct expressions relating to the blessed man who is right with God.

Blessed is he:

1. Whose transgression is forgiven.
2. Whose sin is covered.
3. Unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.
4. In whose spirit there is no guile.

These four things are true of all believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

David wrote this long before Christ came into the world. He wrote it as he was looking on in faith to the coming Saviour and His sacrifice. He exclaimed, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven." He had no thought of God arbitrarily forgiving sins, or passing sin over, as though it were of no moment, but he had in view the work of the Cross, predicted from the very beginning and on down through the ages. You will remember that in Psalm 51, where he makes his great confession, he recognizes the fact that no sacrifice that might be offered upon the

Jewish altars could avail to lay the basis of righteousness, but he cries, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." In other words, the thought in David's mind was this, "I cannot offer a sacrifice sufficient to atone for my sins, but on the basis of that sacrifice which Thou Thyself art about to provide, blot out my transgression and pardon my iniquity." So looking on to the Cross, he could exultantly cry, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered," in the sense of being atoned for.

"No Afeard of God Noo"

When I was a boy they used to tell of a lad who lived in the north of Scotland, who was in great distress whenever he thought of meeting God. He was not very bright—the Scotch called him daft. This wee lad was greatly worried whenever he thought of the fact that some day he would have to give account to God for his sins. Many times his elders heard him crying to himself, "Oh, I dinna want to meet God. I am afeard of God. I canna' meet Him."

People tried to comfort him, but they were not able to make clear to him how anyone could be at peace with God. Finally, in a very simple way, the gospel was explained to the lad, and his joy was unbounded as he saw something of the love and grace of God in giving His Son for him. One day the little fellow was heard crooning to himself, "I am no afeard of God noo, for I am going to heaven noo." Some one said, "Little John, what makes you talk like that? Why are you not afraid of God? Have you not committed sins?"

"Why, I have sinned many times, but I am no afeard of God noo."

"But do you not know that God is righteous and will punish sin?"

"Yes, I have sinned and all that, but I am no afeard of God. He will not punish me."

"Well, what makes you so sure? Can you explain the great doctrine of the atonement?"

Little John scratched his poor, muddled head a moment, and then he said, "Well, some day I am goin' up to meet God, and He will have a big Bible-book in front o' Him, and He will have the sins of all the people written doon in His book. When little John comes up to God, He will turn over the pages of that Bible-book until He finds the one with little John's name on it, but before He can read out the sins, Jesus Christ will be there with His bleeding hand, and He will put it down quick over all the page, and God will look at it, and say, 'I canna find a

sin on this page.' The blood will blot them all out, and little John will gang into heaven."

Little John knew more than many of our doctors of divinity, but there was one thing wrong with his theology. We don't wait until the day of judgment for the blood to blot out our sins, but it is done here and now in this world. The moment a poor sinner comes to God owning his guilt and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, his sin is atoned for, covered, never to be made manifest again, blotted out forever. The Word of God is, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." Again God declares, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud thy sins."

It is only through the atoning work of Jesus Christ that God is enabled thus to be just and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus Christ.

Unforgiven Sins Distress

Listen again to what David says, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." He goes on, and tells of the many weeks and months in which his conscience was in great distress because of his sin. "When I kept silence my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long." There is nothing on earth that will so oppress one, or that will so distress the soul, as a sense of unforgiven sin pressing down upon the conscience. We find in the Scripture, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have mercy."

Have you unforgiven sin resting on your conscience, and have you been hoping to hide it? Be certain that the Word of God is still true: "Be sure your sin will find you out." Some men's sins, we read, are going before them to judgment, and some men they follow after. Some men's sins are so manifest that they can't be hidden. Everyone knows just what they are. Other men manage to keep their sins hidden so that very few on earth know anything about them. By and by, at the judgment bar of God, their sins will seem to leap up and drag their souls to the lowest depths of the pit, when it will be too late to put them away.

Story of Robert Bruce

My heart was stirred as I heard A. H. Stewart tell a story of Scotland's great king, Robert Bruce. On one occasion he was fleeing from the English soldiers of King Edward. They were almost upon him, and he realized he was not maintaining the speed he should, so he left the path and started through the thick forest, hoping to escape. He ran mile after

mile thinking that perhaps, at last, he had eluded the vengeance of his foes, when suddenly he heard a sound that caused his heart almost to stand still. It was the baying of his own bloodhounds. He knew the English had let loose his hounds, and put them on their master's track, and the animals which might be supposed to be doing Robert Bruce a favor in running him down, were leading his foes to the place where he was hidden. He knew now that all was over with him, unless he was able to put something between himself and the dogs to throw off the scent. Spent and worn, he toiled on several more weary miles until he came to a clear, rapid, mountain stream. He plunged in and then hastened down the stream a mile or so, and came out on the other side of the forest. There he hid from the sight of his pursuers and listened as the hounds came to the water, and ran up and down, baying and crying out for the scent. The water had washed it away. They were unable to follow their master, and Robert Bruce escaped from the vengeance of the enemy.

O my friends, there is only one stream that will wash out the scent of sin, and that is the precious blood of Christ which cleanseth from all sin. All who come to Jesus, all who trust in Him, are forever free from the judgment which their sins deserve. So David tells us that the time came when it was impossible for him to hide his own sin, impossible to cover his own transgression, and he says, "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." We read that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Precious Hiding Place

Then you will notice as you drop your eyes down to the seventh verse, that he exclaims, as he looks up into the face of God whom he had sinned against, "Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance." Think of it! For a long time David had been hiding from God, but now we find him hiding in God. Which are you doing today? Are you hiding from Him, or have you fled to Him for refuge and found a safe hiding place? We read in the book of the prophet Isaiah, "And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Isaiah 32:2).

I remember when we were working among the Indians, a little group

of us had gone into an Indian village to present the Word. When we were on our way back to another village, we were overtaken by a tremendous thunder storm. We were near a great, overhanging cliff with a cave within, and our Indian guide led the way hastily through the pouring rain to this great rock, rising up from the floor of the desert, and in that cave we all found shelter. There were nearly thirty of us, and we stood looking out as the lightning flashed, and the water poured down all about us. There together we sang the hymn, "Rock of Ages." We were safe in the rock.

Oh, David knew something of the meaning of this, "Thou art my hiding place."

Playing Big Bear

My eldest son taught me a lesson along this line when he was just a little fellow. There was nothing he liked to play more than bear. First, we had to put some chairs in one corner of the room, with an opening between them. That was the bear's den. Then I had to get down on all fours, with a big shaggy overcoat over me and be the bear. The little fellow would walk past the den, trying to look as if he had no idea that a bear was anywhere near, when suddenly the savage beast would take after him, and we would run through one room and into another. The little fellow was pretty fleet on his feet, but, of course, he would always be caught at last.

The last time we ever played bear, he had run right into the corner of the kitchen, but the corner didn't open. He had his face right in the corner, and was so excited, that he just screamed. Suddenly, you know, the bear was about to spring, when the little fellow wheeled right about face, caught his breath, and said, "I am not a bit afraid. You are not a bear; you are just my own dear papa," and he jumped right into my arms.

I got to my feet, held the little fellow close to me, and tried to quiet him. I said to myself as I walked up and down with him, "Blessed God, it was just like this with me once. I was running away from Thee. I was afraid of Thee. I thought you wanted to destroy me. I tried to find a hiding place from Thee, but Thou didst never give me up."

I remembered the time years before when God ran me into a corner, and I couldn't get away; and instead of trying to run, I turned to Him in repentance, in confession, and said, "I am not afraid of Thee. Thou art not my enemy. I throw myself into Thy loving arms. Thou art my refuge. In Thy tender care and loving mercy, I find a hiding place."

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Save me from its guilt and power.

"Not the labor of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow.
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone."

Have you come to Him like that? Have you realized something of your own helplessness? Have you realized your own sinfulness, the utter hopelessness of your ever making atonement for your own guilt? Have you turned to Him as David, and said, "I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord." Then you have a right to add, "Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." He says, "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found."

Prayer in the Wrong Place

Sometimes people put prayer in the wrong place. They have an idea that it is necessary to come to God and plead with Him, and pray to Him to put away their sins, and save them in His mercy. Dear friends, Scripture turns things just the other way. Paul says, "As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

I can remember the night I was converted. I can recall, though I was just fourteen, kneeling in my own room in the presence of God. I began to beseech Him to look upon me in grace, and save my soul. Then I thought, "What is it that I am asking God to do? I am asking Him to do something that He has been offering to do for years, but I have been refusing to permit Him to do it. I am asking Him to give me something—salvation, eternal life—which He has been offering me for years past, and yet here I come pleading for it. Why not simply accept His salvation and thank Him?"

I remember the words that came home to my soul, "He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Kneeling there I said to Him, "Blessed God, I do believe

in Thy Son. I trust Him now as my Saviour, and Thou hast told me, 'He that believeth on him is not condemned.'" I knew then and there that He had saved me in His infinite love and kindness. I knew something of the meaning of David's expression, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."

If you are thinking seriously of these things, but do not know that your sins are forgiven, are covered, or that your soul is saved, let me say to you, just look up by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, and He will save you right now. "He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

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