

# Psalm Beatitudes

Psalm 32:1      *A Maskil of David.*

*A Psalm of instruction by David. (LXA)*

**Blessed** is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

<sup>2</sup> **Blessed** is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

<sup>3</sup> For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

<sup>4</sup> For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah

<sup>5</sup> I 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

<sup>6</sup> Therefore 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.

<sup>7</sup> You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance. Selah

<sup>8</sup> I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

<sup>9</sup> Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.

<sup>10</sup> Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.

<sup>11</sup> Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

Ps 33:1      (No superscription in the Hebrew)

*\*A Psalm of David. (LXA)\**

Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright.

<sup>2</sup> Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!

<sup>3</sup> Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.

<sup>4</sup> For the word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness.

<sup>5</sup> He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.

<sup>6</sup> By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.

<sup>7</sup> He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses.

<sup>8</sup> Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!

<sup>9</sup> For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

<sup>10</sup> The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples.

<sup>11</sup> The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.

<sup>12</sup> **Blessed** is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!

<sup>13</sup> The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man;

<sup>14</sup> from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth,

<sup>15</sup> he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds.

<sup>16</sup> The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.

<sup>17</sup> The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue.

<sup>18</sup> Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love,

<sup>19</sup> that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine.

<sup>20</sup> Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and our shield.

<sup>21</sup> For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name.

<sup>22</sup> Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you.

Vs

**Psalm 34** *Of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.*

1 (aleph, ' )

**A**t all times, I will bless the LORD; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

2 (bet, b)

**B**oasting in the LORD is what my soul does; let the humble hear and be glad.

3 (gimel, g)

**C**ommend his name together, all of us; Oh magnify the LORD with me!

4 (dalet, d)

**D**elivered me from all my fears. I sought the LORD, and he answered me.

5 (he, h)

**E**ffulgent are those who look to him, and their faces shall never be ashamed.

6 (vav, v)

**F**or this poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles.

7 (zayin, z)

**G**od the Angel encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

8 (het, ch)

**H**appy is the man who takes refuge in him! Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!

9 (tet, t)

**I**nadequacy doesn't exist for those who fear him. Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints.

10 (yod, y)

**J**uvenile lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

11 (kaf, k)

**K**ids, come and listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

12 (lamed, l)

**L**oving life and many days, is that not what a man desires that he may see good?

13 (mem, m)

**M**anage your evil tongue, and keep your lips from speaking deceit.

14 (nun, n)

**N**ow turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

15	(samech, s)	<b>O</b> n the righteous are the eyes of the LORD, and his ears toward their cry.
16	(ayin, ‘)	<b>P</b> eople who do evil, the face of the LORD is against them, to cut off their memory from the earth.
17	(pey, p)	<b>Q</b> uelling all their troubles, when the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them.
18	(tsade, ts)	<b>R</b> eady to save the crushed in spirit, the LORD is near the brokenhearted.
19	(qof, q)	<b>S</b> undry are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.
20	(resh, r)	<b>T</b> hose bones of his he keeps; not one of them is broken.
21	(shin, sh)	<b>U</b> ngodly wicked are slain by affliction, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
22	(tav, t)	<b>V</b> alorously, the LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

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Psalm 32-33

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## Don't Worry, Be Happy

WHEN I WAS IN COLLEGE, the first and still only acapella song to chart #1 on the Billboard Hot 100 was **Bobby McFerrin's "Don't Worry, Be Happy."** It spent two weeks at number one and pretty much the entire year on the regular play cycle. The song was everywhere. People couldn't get enough of it. It became a mantra of my

Freshman class. I even bought the record (yes, I said record, and they even had cds back then). Today you hardly hear it even on oldies stations, probably because it was so overplayed back then.<sup>1</sup>

The unique genre and hopeful lyrics of the song begged for interpretations. And the culture obliged, ranging anywhere from *what is a wonderful philosophy of life* to *what complete and even dangerous sentimental garbage*. Christians were divided on whether it was a good motto or a bad one. I went to a Christian Liberal Arts college, and we even had a chapel service dedicated to thinking about the song.

Because of something in our Psalms, this week I decided to see what I could find about its origins. *Wikipedia*, that bastion of truthful-news, tells us that McFerrin noticed a poster of the pop-Hindu guru Meher Baba—who used this as his motto when he came to the West—in the apartment building of two of his jazz friends in San Francisco, but it gives no citation. Apparently, he is quoted as saying,

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<sup>1</sup> Strangely, the song was used by the National Lottery in their campaign ads on television and radio a while back. I say “strangely,” because the song isn’t about winning lots of money, but actually the opposite. In typical Blues lyric fashion, it is about having no money for rent, the landlord kicking you out of your apartment, he’s probably going to sue you, and now you are homeless. On top of this, you don’t even have a gal to make you smile. But when you worry, it just makes things worse. So be happy.

“Whenever you see a poster of Meher Baba, it usually says, ‘Don’t worry, be happy,’ which is a pretty neat philosophy in four words, I think.” It cites an article from October 21, 1988 in *USA Weekend* magazine. Though I don’t doubt that he said this, and it doesn’t surprise me that even a Hindu could have a motto like that, for God wrote the requirements of the law on the hearts of all mankind, I’m skeptical that this was the real root of the song’s birth into this world.

You see, McFerrin is a Christian, and he isn’t shy about it. One article back in 1988 said, “**The 38-year-old McFerrin indicates no tie-in to Meher Baba’s mantra.**”<sup>2</sup> And in a more recent interview on PBS, he himself said, “**Many times, if I’m trying to memorize a verse in the Bible, I’ll make up a song so that I don’t forget it. You know, that’s what I did with “Don’t Worry, Be Happy ... I was working on Scriptures to memorize, so I wouldn’t forget.”**<sup>3</sup> Two Scriptures come to mind in this slogan. Both are from *Jesus*.

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<sup>2</sup> **Michael Saunders**, “Don’t Worry, Be Happy’—it’s Catching,” *SunSentinel* (Sept 20, 1988), [http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/1988-09-20/features/8802240060\\_1\\_bobby-mcferrin-meher-baba-song](http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/1988-09-20/features/8802240060_1_bobby-mcferrin-meher-baba-song).

<sup>3</sup> **Bobby McFerrin**, “Bobby McFerrin Extended Interview,” *PBS* May 24, 2013. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2013/08/09/may-24-2013-bobby-mcferrin-extended-interview/18434/>.

Both are in the Sermon on the Mount. “Do not worry about your life” (Matt 6:25) and “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad” (Matt 5:12). Therefore, given the location of the last verse, and his own testimony to what he was doing, one might call this song the **beatitude** of my generation.

Rejoice and be glad comes at the end of Jesus’ famous Beatitudes, of which there are **eight**. It is kind of a summary verse of the word *makairos*. The word means “**blessed**” or differently, “**Transcendent happiness or religious joy**” (Friberg’s Lexicon). It translates the Hebrew *esher* four times in our psalms today: Ps 32:1, 2; 33:13; 34:9). It will appear many times again in the Psalms, even as it has already—at the beginning of the Psalter in the first two poems. “**Happy** is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of the scornful” (Psalm 1:1 JPS). “**Happy** are all they that take refuge in [the Son]” (Ps 2:12 JPS). If these two songs are set the stage for all the others, then the Psalms are themselves all about beatitude. Today, because of their arrangement and this common theme in Psalms 32-34, I want to look specifically at this idea.

Ours is not a happy age. Too many people are remarkably ... miserable. When you think the opposite of happy, perhaps you think, like the dictionary does, of depression. Antonyms of “happy” include *depressed*, *down*, *melancholy*, *miserable*, *sad*, *sorrowful*, *troubled*. I do think that we live in a day when many people are sad like this, even Christians. They aren’t happy, even though we have Jesus’ own teaching on the beatitudes. They feel alone, isolated, unable to tell anyone, afraid of what others will think, paralyzed to tell anyone or make a change, and so on.

Sometimes being depressed like this is a thing of its own making. But sometimes, there is an even deeper root: **anger**. When I think the opposite of happy, I think angry, not sad. Curiously, the thesaurus does not have “angry” as an antonym for “happy.” But when you go the other way, listen to antonyms of “angry”: calm, cheerful, peaceful, joyful, **happy**. Ours is increasingly a very angry society. If the last three months of politics haven’t taught you that, nothing will. As I was doing that rather silly search for the origin of the song, I listened to an interview by McFerrin. I was struck by something he said in this regard. “**Most of the time the media portrays the Christian faith it is the extreme**

faction of it, the weirdos, the people who are angry and bitter. Now, angry and Christian don't go together. It's an oxymoron. You can't be an angry Christian."<sup>4</sup> And yet, for whatever reason, it is rare to find truly happy, joyful, exuberant Christians, those who love life, live it deeply, love God, and enjoy him profoundly, love others, and love them like themselves. Too many other things distract us and make us angry or sad. We need to be people of The Beatitudes. But how? Let's go to our Psalms.

## Three Psalms Together

We are looking at **Psalms 32, 33, and 34**. Continuing our long-term strategy of reading the Psalms together, these songs were clearly **placed together for numerous reasons**. Here are a few to get us going. Regarding **Psalms 32 and 33**, many have argued, even in the ancient church, that they were originally one song. Why? **First**, there are a total of two songs in Book 1 of the Psalms that have no superscription. Psalm 10, which as we saw probably should be considered part two of Psalm 9, and Psalm 33. At the very

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid ("Extended Interview").

least, this should cause an eyebrow to be raised. **Second**, you will notice that they begin and end the very same way (“**Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart! ... Shout for you in the LORD, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright**” [Ps 32:11; 33:1]). **Third**, there is a possible literary connection where the two songs form a single chiasm.<sup>5</sup> **Fourth**, some have suggested that whereas Psalm 32 raises certain teaching points in how the godly should live, Psalm 33 expands on just those points.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> From “Literary Structure (Chiasm, Chiasmus) of Psalms,” [http://www.bible.literarystructure.info/bible/19\\_Psalms\\_pericope\\_e.html#30](http://www.bible.literarystructure.info/bible/19_Psalms_pericope_e.html#30).

Ps32:1-33:22	
P (32:1a)	32:1 Of David. (32:1)
A (32:1b-2)	32:1 Happy the sinner whose fault is removed, whose sin is forgiven. (32:1)
B (32:3-7)	32:5 Then I declared my sin to you; my guilt I did not hide. (32:5)
C (32:8-9)	32:8 I will instruct you and show you the way you should walk, give you counsel and watch over you. (32:8)
D (32:10-11)	"32:11 Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you just; exult, all you upright of heart. (32:11)" (צדיקים)
D' (33:1-3)	"33:1 Rejoice, you just, in the LORD; praise from the upright is fitting. (33:1)" (צדיקים)
C' (33:4-11)	33:4 For the LORD'S word is true; all his works are trustworthy. (33:4)
B' (33:12-17)	33:15 The one who fashioned the hearts of them all knows all their works. (33:15)
A' (33:18-22)	33:19 Delivering them from death, keeping them alive in times of famine.

A: Salvation from death.  
 B: To become clear.  
 C: The words of the LORD.  
 D: You just.

**James Jordan** (“Psalms 32: Translation and Commentary”) has a different structure with two chiasms, but still seeing the two Psalms together. <https://theopolisinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/psalm-32-print.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Compare Ps 32:10 with 33:16-19 and 32:9 with 33:20-22. **Going Deeper:** James Jordan writes, “Psalm 33 is the only other psalm in Book 1 that has no title. In context, this stands out and alerts the reader that something may be going on. Of course, later in the psalter we find

Then there are the connections between Psalms 33 and 34. Notice that both have 22 verse-lines in Hebrew for instance. 22 is the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and thus someone has called Psalm 33 “an alphabet psalm,”<sup>7</sup> even though it doesn’t begin with each new letter of the alphabet. However, that is exactly what Psalm 34 does! It is the third acrostic psalm in the Psalter, and the first that is complete meaning that all 22 letters are there in order.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, all three psalms have the *makairos*, the happy/blessed theme in them. This is something we have not seen since Psalm 2. Furthermore, the word appears at

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numerous untitled psalms, but not in Books 1 & 2. We naturally think that perhaps Psalm 33 is really the second part of Psalm 32. If we read the psalms together, they make sense as a unity. Moreover, Psalm 33 consists of 22 lines, and while it is not an abecedary, the 22 lines do point to the alphabet (the Hebrew alphabet). This might indicate a closed work, separate from Psalm 32, except that Psalm 32:8 says that God will instruct and show the way to go. This can be seen as setting up the alphabetical allusion that follows in Psalm 33. We do find in ancient sources that these were regarded as one psalm.” James B. Jordan, “The Structure of the Psalter, Some Observations,” Rite Reasons Newsletter No. 54 (Nov 1997), <http://www.biblicalhorizons.com/rite-reasons/no-54-the-structure-of-the-psalter-some-observations/>

<sup>7</sup> On this and some of this discussion see Bruce K. Waltke, James M. Houston, and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Lament: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 107.

<sup>8</sup> I thought about preaching Psalm 31 and 32 together because of how many similarities they have as well (“I said” [31:14; 32:5; distress and bodily blows [31:9-13; 32:3-4]; instructions [31:23ff.; 32:8-11]; “Seek refuge in God,” 31:1[2]; 32:7; “escape,” 31:1[2]; 32:7; *zû* (a rare relative pronoun, 31:4[5] 32:8); “trust,” 31:6[7]; 32:10; “rejoice,” 31:7[8]; 32:11; “kindness,” 31:7, 16, 21[8, 17, 22]; 32:10; “bone,” 31:10[11]; 32:3; “time,” 31:15[16]; 32:6; “human,” 31:19[20]; 32:2; “shelter,” 31:20[21]; 32:7; “godly,” 31:23[24]; 32:6; “guard,” 31:23[24]; 32:7.), but because of the *makairos*, I decided to do it the way I’m doing it here.

critical junctures in each of the songs. In the first Psalm, it is the **first and second verses**. In the second song, it is in the **center verse, indeed the center word** of the poem. In the third song, it is in the curious **eighth letter**. This is curious because there are both eight Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount and as several have noticed, eight beatitudes in Book 1 of the Psalter.<sup>9</sup> Beatitude, then, seems to be a deliberate organizing principle behind the three songs, which already have so much in common. As we turn now to the poems, we are going to see three main ideas that help us understand how a Christian can and must have this Beatitude stance in life. For it is what God has called us to be.

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<sup>9</sup> They are: **Ps 1:1; 2:12; 32:1-2 (2x); 33:12; 34:9; 40:5; 41:2**. See **J. L. Mays**, *Psalms* (Atlanta: Westminster John Know Press, 1994), 40; **J. C. McCann**, "The Shape of Book I of the Psalter and the Shape of Human Happiness," in *The Book of Psalms VTSup 99*, ed. W. Flint & P. Miller (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005), 340-38. Cited in **Gordon McConville**, "Happiness in the Psalms," *ActaTheol* 31.15 (Jan 2011), *sciELO* at:

[http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S1015-87582011000400005](http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1015-87582011000400005)

# Psalm 32<sup>10</sup>: Happy is the Man Whose Sin is Forgiven

Psalm 32 teaches us one of the most important things we could ever know about having *esher* or *makairos*, that is being happy/blessed. This is not happiness for the sake of happiness. It is not happiness as an end to itself. It is not happiness that ignores the problems in the world or in your life by pretending they don't exist. Biblical beatitudes do not call us to be happy by ignoring reality any more than "Don't Worry, Be Happy" is telling us we will win the lottery. In fact, it's just the opposite. It is happiness *in the midst* of those

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<sup>10</sup> **Psalm 32** is basically divided into two parts: vv. 1-5 and 6-10, with vs. 11 as a conclusion. Each of the two parts is a chiasm:

- 1a) **Ps 32:1-2**, Happy is the man who transgression + sin is forgiven + covered/ in whose spirit there is no guile;
- 1b) **Ps 32:3a**, When I kept silent;
- 1c) **Ps 32:3b**, My bones waxed old through my groaning all the day long;
- central axis) **Ps 32:4a**, **For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;**
- 2c) **Ps 32:4b**, My vital moisture was turned into the drought of summer. Selah;
- 2b) **Ps 32:5a-b**, I acknowledge my sin/ my iniquity I have not hidden/ I will confess unto the Lord;
- 2a) **Ps 32:5c**, And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah;
  
- 1b) **Ps 32:6-7**, Two part theme repeated for emphasis: the righteous preserved through trouble:
  - 1a) **Ps 32:8a**, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go;"
  - 1b) **Ps 32:8b**, "I will guide you with My eye;"
  - central axis) **Ps 32:9a**, **"Do not be as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding;"**
  - 2b) **Ps 32:9b**, "Whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle;"
  - 2a) **Ps 32:9c**, "Lest they come near to you;"
- 2b) **Ps 32:10**, Many are the sorrows of the wicked: but he that trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him;
  
- 2a) **Ps 32:11**, Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, you righteous: and shout for joy, all you that are upright in heart.

things. In this song, we are happy because our sins are forgiven. And this is truly one of the great things to be happy for in all the world.

It states this right up front. “Blessed [happy] is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed [happy] is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.” (Ps 32:1-2). What is it about this that makes a person happy and blessed?

Let’s look at the first three terms used to describe the human condition. “Transgressions” (*pesha* [פֶּשַׁע]) are acts of deliberate rebellion against God. The Greek word (*anomia*) is lawlessness. Can a person who deliberately sins against God be forgiven? Yes! THAT is truly amazing. “Sin” (*chataah* [חַטָּא]; Gk: *hamartia*) is the most general term and it means an offense or a turning away from the true path. “Iniquity” (*avon* [אָוֹן]; Gk: *hamartia* again) is criminality, especially the absence of respect for the divine will. As Craigie says, they describe the full dimension of human evil,<sup>11</sup> and therefore the point is that no matter how

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<sup>11</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 2nd ed., vol. 19, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville, TN: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2004), 266.

terrible a person has been, literally no matter what they have done, they can experience forgiveness from God. There is no sin too great that God will not forgive it. And because of it, they can be happy.

The last line of **vs. 2** adds something else. “**In whose spirit there is no deceit.**” Now, deceit is also a sin. But it is tempting to isolate this verse from the context. Yet, to do so would we be to destroy the first three lines of the song. He isn’t saying that forgiveness means you have no deceit in your spirit or heart. But rather, he is saying that **deceit is not present in the context of confessing sin.** That is, the person receiving forgiveness holds nothing back from God. They are willing to tell him everything they have done. They have no deceit, they are not trying to fool God by lying to him about some of their sins.

This is where **vs. 3** comes in. “**For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.**” Silent about what? About his sin. He refused to confess it to God. He held it in. He kept it secret. As if God didn’t know about it! But know He most certainly did. While David was keeping silent, “**Day and night your hand was heavy upon**

me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah” (4). Pause.

The consequences of holding sin inside, in not confessing it to the LORD are that they eat you away from the inside, like maggots eating roadkill in the scorching summer sun in Death Valley. And this is the LORD’s doing! It is not karma or fate. It is punishment meant to turn the sinner to repentance. The punishment *is* the being eating from the inside out because of holding in your sin. When someone lives in this way, it is called living in sin, and all unrepentant people are guilty in this regard. And if they have any conscience left, they are being eaten alive *and they know it*. If they have severed their conscience, they are still being eaten alive, they just don’t see it yet. The question is, who will turn to the LORD for forgiveness and thus happiness? Will you? Or will you live and die in the misery of known and unconfessed sin?

David is resolved. “I 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” (32:5). Since this takes us back to the first two verses, a word needs to be said here about its important

use in the NT, in [the book of Romans](#). After discussing the human condition which we call “[Total Depravity](#)” for nearly three chapters, leveling every human being flat in the face of God’s law, suddenly, the Apostle Paul turns to good news.

He explains this news using examples drawn from two people. These examples come to their ultimate point in the citation of Psalm 32:1-2 and the happiness that comes from this good news. The first example is [Abraham \(Rom 4:1-5\)](#). Abraham is perhaps the greatest human in the OT, the father of the nation of Israel. Did the good news come to him because he was a good man, or to put it the way Paul does, because of his good works? No, but rather he was justified by faith and not works, and all you have to do is read the story of Abraham to see that this man sinned many times. He quotes [Genesis 15:6](#), “[Abraham believed God, and it was counted/reckoned/credited to him as righteousness](#)” ([Rom 4:3](#)).

He then moves to [David \(6-8\)](#) and says that David speaks of exactly the same thing. He calls it the “[blessing](#)” or the “[happiness](#)” ([6](#)). And it comes to a person when God reckons them righteous apart from works! For you see, it is not

possible to 1. Gain this happiness through works or 2. Be truly happy trying to earn God's favor because we sin. And thus he quotes Psalm 32:1-2a.

The key word here is “reckon,” which appears in the Abraham and David verses. In the Psalm, this reckoning comes through confessing of sin. Abraham is the flip side. He has faith. Of course, David has faith too, which is why he confesses his sin to God, and we have seen his trust many times in the Psalms. So what does this reckoning do?

The word is a courtroom term. It is a declaration from a bench by a judge toward a defendant. The Judge has the power to reckon or declare certain things. In this case, it is not that he is reckoning good works, but that he is not reckoning sins against people.<sup>12</sup>

Doug Moo writes that “It is clear that the forgiveness of sins is a basic component of justification. [Paul is comparing] justification to the non-accrediting or not ‘imputing’ of sins to a person. This is an act that has nothing to do with moral transformation, but ‘changes’ people only in the sense that their relationship to God is changed—they are ‘acquitted’

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<sup>12</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 266.

rather than condemned.”<sup>13</sup> If you aren’t experiencing this happiness, it is because either you 1. Are not justified and haven’t trusted Christ by faith and need to do so right now. Or 2. You are refusing to confess your sins as a Christian, like David refused for a time to do.

But when you do, the rest of the Psalm teaches what happens. This Psalm is called a *maskil* of David. And the word *maskil* comes from the root meaning “wisdom” or “instruction,” hence the LXX’s translation: A Psalm of Instruction.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the Psalm instructs us in three things. First, healing in body and mind. His bones wasted away, until he confessed his sin (3-5). Second, deliverance in times of distress. “Therefore, let everyone who is godly offer

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Someone has defined it in the Psalms as “a song sprung out of and containing supra-normal insight and effect . . . and testifies to the connection between the psalmists and ‘wisdom.’” Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship II* (trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas; New York: Abingdon, 1962), 94. The etymology of the word: “In both biblical Hebrew and Aramaic the root means to ‘have insight’ or to make insightful; in the Hebrew Bible the verb occurs only in the hiphil, from which the term *Maškîl* is derived. In Aramaic, the aphel of the root means ‘to make insightful, have insight,’ while the ithpaal means ‘to acquire insight, comprehend, pay attention’; the noun forms meaning ‘insight,’ and ‘understanding.’ in Syriac, the pael of *skl* likewise means ‘to have insight’ and ‘to proclaim.’ In *Ahiqar* 147 the term appears with the meaning to be ‘clever’ or ‘consider.’ Steven Dunn, “Wisdom Editing in the Book of Psalms: Vocabulary, Themes, and Structures,” a Dissertation at Marquette University (Milwaukee, WI: 2009), 56. [http://epublications.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1012&context=dissertations\\_mu](http://epublications.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1012&context=dissertations_mu)

prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him. You are a hiding place ... you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with ... deliverance” (Ps 32:6-7). Third, the guidance and loving care of the Lord.<sup>15</sup> “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go” (8).

The Psalm concludes with a proverb: “Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with a bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you” (9). In other words, do what is right, including confessing your sins to the LORD. Or, there will be great sadness all the days of your life. For “Many are the sorrows of the wicked” (10). But if you confess and turn and walk in the way you should go, “steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD” (10). Therefore, “Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart” (11).

## Happy is the Nation Whose God is Yahweh

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<sup>15</sup> Mark A. Seifrid, “Romans,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 624.

If the first happiness comes to **an individual** from the forgiveness of sins, the second comes to **a group** when the LORD is their God. The beatitude in Psalm 33 comes in the center verse of the Psalms' chiasm and the center word of the song (there are 80 words before and after it!

- 1a) [Psa 33:1-3](#), Rejoice in the Lord/ Praise + give thanks + sing unto Him with shouts of joy;
- 1b) [Psa 33:4-11](#), By His word He created all things/ let all the earth fear the Lord (His counsel shall stand);
- central axis) [Psa 33:12](#), Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He has chosen as His own inheritance;**
- 2b) [Psa 33:13-19](#), His eye regards the sons of men/ put not your trust in kings, armies, mighty men, strength;
- 2a) [Psa 33:20-22](#) {p} We have waited for Him; our help + shield by His mercy/ in Him we rejoice;

It teaches, “**Blessed is the nation whose God is Yahweh, the people He has chosen as his own heritage” (Ps 33:12).** Many might read this verse and think of the United States, after all, the common myth is that we are a Christian nation. While you could make the argument that early on the colonies of America were Christian, you just can't make that argument with the United States, whose Founding Fathers were not only Christians, but also Deists, Masons (deeply involved in esoteric occult worship), and Atheists.

But even besides this, such an idea is called reading the future into the text. The verse makes it clear that the “nation” in mind is the “people whom he has chosen.” In the OT, this worked on two levels, even as it does in the NT. There was the physical nation of Israel which was the inheritance of the Son of God (Deut 32:9). Then there are those inside of it who are called to salvation by faith through election. In the NT era it is extremely doubtful that any country has ever had this honor, as Christ inherits all the nations—not geo-political empires, but rather people from every tribe, and tongue, and nation. It is not the “Holy Roman Empire” that can say this, nor America even in Colonial days, try as many did to make them as Christian as possible. Rather, it is Christ’s church—visible with wheat and tares. Invisible with his elect who are called to himself by election. This is Peter’s “holy nation” (1Pe 2:9). And therefore, as God’s people, Christians—especially when gathered together, are to be profoundly happy people, for God has chosen them to be his treasured possession. This is a great, great blessing. What then must it do to our anger and sadness?

The Psalm begins as the previous left off: “Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright” (33:1). Happiness! He calls the righteous to sing with instruments (lyre and harp, 2). He calls them to sing a new song (3). The happiness exudes from God’s people in the form of music.

The song turns next to [the doctrine of creation](#).<sup>16</sup> Several verses become a kind of commentary on Genesis 1. Amazingly, it details all Three Persons of the Holy Trinity. [The first is Yahweh, the Father](#). He is the one who has a Word (4, 6). By the Word, he displays his works and his righteousness, and his justice, and his steadfast love (4-5). By the Word, he created the heavens and the earth (6-9). He is the one the whole earth is to fear (8). He is the one who brings the counsel of the nations to nothing (10). He is the one whose own counsel (council?) stands forever. These are the plans of his heart, and nothing can thwart them, because he is God. He looks down from heaven on the children of man (13). This is where he sits enthroned (14). He fashions our hearts. He observes all our deeds. He knows everything we do (15).

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<sup>16</sup> Psalm 33:6, 9 are quoted in Heb 11:3.

**The Second is the Word.** Too many people fail to see the Word-Christ in the OT. They depersonalize God's word, turning it into a thing rather than a Person. But notice, "For the Word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness" (4). "Word" is the subject. "Yahweh" is the modifier. This is Yahweh's (The Father's) Word, and the *Word* is called "His." The same thing occurs in vs. 6 where the Word makes the heavens. It is because of language like this that the NT says things like, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth" (Col 1:15-16). Paul didn't make it up. It is right here in David's song.

**The Third is the Holy Spirit.** He is called the "Breath" of Yahweh (6). Breath is the word *ruach* and it is translated as breath/wind/spirit. This is the Holy Spirit of God in the NT, and David calls him the Creator. In this case, he created the heavenly beings, but the same is true of all three persons, of course.

After exposing for us the great Power of this God who acts according to three Persons in creation, and telling us that he stands over his creation as king, thwarting and frustrating the plans of his rebellious image-bearers, but

causing all of his own plans to succeed, we learn that those who are truly happy are those whose God is Yawheh **because he has chosen them**. In the context of depravity like this, the choosing of God is necessary, because by ourselves, all we do is seek to usurp his rule and disobey his laws.

The song ends with a reflection on where true power resides. Men think it is in kings, dictators, presidents. Others think it is in a strong military. Still others think it is in physical prowess and presence and power. Now, king David writes the following remember: **“The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue”** (16-17). The most powerful things on earth and they are absolutely incapable of saving and thus bringing blessing and happiness. Why then put so much of ourselves into them, thereby often making ourselves needlessly angry or depressed?

But **“Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine”** (18-19). Our God is a God who does these things for his

people that fear him, who hope in his covenantal love. He does what the warrior, the king, and the war horse cannot.

And therefore the refrain of the song? Happiness! “Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name.” (20-21). Trust. Faith. Gladness. Happiness. This is the beatitude that comes to all of his people together, because he has chosen them to be his own. Therefore, “Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you” (22).

## Happy is the Man Who Takes Refuge in Christ

The final beatitude takes the Triune God of Psalm 33 and, while still having in mind the Father generally, turns the focus of our faith more specifically to the only Mediator between God and men, which makes sense, because you can't find forgiveness except by going through him. Vs. 8 says, “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!” This is an invitation to you who are hearing, but not tasting. You have heard today that there is happiness to be found, but you have not taken it into your bodies system by faith. How do you

do that? “Blessed/happy is the man who takes refuge in him” (8). You must trust in the Son.

We might as well begin here in vs. 8, because it is quoted by Peter who says, “If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious” (2Pe 2:3-4). Peter takes our verse and refers to “him,” that is “the Lord” as the living stone chosen by God. In other words, he sees the LORD in Psalm 34:8 as Jesus.

Now, I think most will accept that this is what Peter does, but my experience has been that many people will say that *we* have no business doing that—that is seeing Christ in places like this—because we are not inspired Apostles. I don’t like the implications of this kind of thinking, because 1. It implies that the only way you can really see Jesus in the OT is if you are an inspired Apostle and 2. It basically means that they had secret information that we don’t have, or worse, that they just made up, which was OK with God, because they were Apostles.

No, friends. Psalm 34 is about Jesus. The next, safest way to see this is vs. 20. “He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.” Now, clearly the “he” here refers to the

Father. From vs. 18-19, “The LORD is near to the broken hearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones...” However, John tells us that this last part of the verse was fulfilled in Jesus, the great Suffering Servant (John 19:36). “His bones” are Jesus’ bones. This confirms that a second verse in fact about him.

He is the one who was crushed in spirit, broken hearted, afflicted, yet delivered. And yet, though this is a deep mystery that no one can truly fathom, it is fascinating that through this, God comes near to others who are brokenhearted. For did he not read the scroll of Isaiah at the beginning of his ministry, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to ... heal the brokenhearted” (Luke 4:18). And this is why you must come to him to be forgiven by God and to receive great joy. For he as man knows your sorrow, he carries out the duties of Yahweh in vv. 18-19, and as God he forgives your iniquity on behalf of God. This is what Psalm 34 is really all about. Who could not be happy about that, and if happy, also blessed!

There is more. **Psalm 34:5** says, “Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.” Radiant, shining faces when they look to the LORD? This language comes from **Moses**. You might recall that “the Israelites could not gaze at Moses’ face because of its glory” (**2Co 3:7**). The story goes that Moses had been talking “face to face” with the LORD. And yet remember, no one has seen the Father at all (**John 1:18**). After this long time on the mountain, he came down and it says, “Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God” (**Ex 34:29**). Even Aaron was afraid to come near him (**30**). And yet, in the Psalm, we sing about how those who look to the Lord have faces that are radiant like this. Radiant ... with joy!

There is more. Remember that the LORD **delivers** him out of all afflictions (**19**)? Well, earlier it says “The Angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them” (**Ps 34:7**), so it’s a parallel. Now, over the years many have thought this passage teaches generally that the LORD uses angels to help his people. And this is certainly true. Gill says,

A created angel may be intended, even a single one, which is sufficient to guard a multitude of saints, since one could destroy at once such a vast number of enemies, as in 2 Kings 19:35. or one may be put for more, since they are an innumerable company that are on the side of the Lord's people, and to whom they are joined; and these may be said to encamp about them, because they are an host or army; see Gen. 32:1, 2; Luke 2:13 and are the guardians of the saints, that stand up for them and protect them, as well as minister to them.<sup>17</sup>

But he also admits it may be meant “the uncreated Angel, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Angel of God's presence, and of the covenant, the Captain of salvation, the Leader and Commander of the people; and whose salvation is as walls and bulwarks about them; or as an army surrounding them.”<sup>18</sup> This was the view of Augustine, Spurgeon, and Boice, as well as many commentators today who identify him as the Commander of the Armies of the LORD who met Joshua.<sup>19</sup> Spurgeon said he is “The covenant angel, the

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<sup>17</sup> John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament*, vol. 3, The Baptist Commentary Series (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1810), 668.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 667-68.

<sup>19</sup> Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 34.10; Spurgeon, *Treasury of David* Psalm 34.7; James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 1–41: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 296; Craigie, 279; Kidner, 157-58; Williams and Ogilvie, 272; Harman, 290.

Lord Jesus, at the head of all the bands of heaven, surround[ing] with his army the dwellings of the saints.” The image, it seems to me, begins with the Angel of the LORD in Genesis who encamps near Jacob and whom Jacob said rescued and delivered him (Gen 32:11, 24-29, 33ff; 48:15-16). It moves on into the Exodus where the Angel of God goes before the camp of Israel in the pillar of cloud to stand and fight for him (Ex 14:19-20).

Here it is good to notice that Psalm 34 is a song “when [David] changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away” (Ps 34:1). David was fleeing from Saul and went to find sanctuary in the castle of a foreign king. But when the king found out that David was also a king who had songs sung about him killing thousands of people, David became afraid and acted insanelly in the court, so that they thought he was a madman (1Sa 21:10-15). The point here is that even in a foreign country ruled by other gods, nothing can stop the Angel of the LORD from entering their territory and protecting his own.

One more thing to know about Psalm 34 is that it is **the first complete acrostic Psalm**. It is an alphabet song that therefore teaches us how blessed they are who have tasted and seen that Christ is good! Because of this, they are happy. Because of this, they bless the LORD all the time (**Ps 34:1**). Because of this, their souls constantly boast in the LORD and are humble (**2**) or “poor” (**6**), and the LORD saves him. Because of this, they praise God together (**3**) and help one another fear him (**9**). Because of this, they lack no good thing, while those on the hunt for them, like lions, suffer want and hunger (**10**).

To help them in their future, the LORD **teaches his children** to fear him, he does not leave them to themselves (**11**). The last half of the poem is all about being taught by the LORD, fitting for an alphabet song that teaches us about Christ who is the Wisdom and Name of God. “**Let us exalt his Name together!**” (**3**).

As you think about these three songs, remember their beatitudes. If you love life and long days of years, keep your tongue from evil (**13**). Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it (**14**). When you cry for help, know that he is near. And be happy. Don't be ruled by anger or

sadness. For he has forgiven your sins, made all of his people rejoice, He has given many of them to you that you may be encouraged in fellowship and prayer and the means of grace, and he allowed you to come to him through the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ in whose name we praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Blessed be the man who takes refuge in him.