



FORGIVE

us our sins

7th March 2021

3rd Sunday of Lent

The danger of hiding in sand caves.

"How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart?

The commands of the Lord are clear, giving insight for living.
Cleanse me from hidden faults. Keep your servant from deliberate sins!
Don't let them control me. Then I will be free of guilt and innocent of
great sin." Psalm 19: 12a, 8b, 12b-13

Main Point:

Our heavenly Father has created a safe hiding place into which He invites us to run when we feel guilt and shame over our sins. The hiding place is His Son Jesus. Jesus' sacrifice of Himself, forgives all our guilt and shame, so we may know with confidence we are forgiven and reconciled to our heavenly Father.

Intro | There is a warning story my mother used to tell my sister and I every summer as we dug holes and built sand castles on the beach.

Year after year she would say, "I told you before, never ever dig hole large enough that you can get inside it. Years ago I read an article about a group of boys who dug a sand cave and used it as a cubby house.

One day, the boys were playing inside their cave, and of course [know you all know what I'm about to say] the sand gave way and they were buried alive.¹

We say to ourselves, 'how silly, everyone knows the danger of hiding inside cave made of sand.'

But, today I'd like to share how many of us do exactly the same, when we run and hide in anything other than God's perfectly safe, purpose-built, hiding place.

Today, we move onto the next portion of the Jesus' prayer, our request for our heavenly Father to "forgive us our sins", we find today's Psalm is so incredibly relevant.

Like many Psalms, David opens his prayer with an explosion of praise using the most poetic and beautiful declaration that the heavens and the earth continually proclaim the majesty of its Creator.

As the Apostle Paul, who I think had this Psalm in mind, writes,

"God's invisible attributes are clearly seen being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead ..." (Romans 1:20).

One of the reasons a magnificent scene such as a starry sky or a breathtaking landscape so moves us, is because it give us a sense of being in the presence of a divine being who is so much more powerful and perfect than we are.

Such magnificence, **"speaks without a sound or word, yet their message has gone throughout the earth."** (v3-4)

It is a message of beauty, power, creativity and perfection.

¹ <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/boy-11-dies-in-sand-tunnel-cave-in/GQRBXJDBDWYUUJAIZ5P4ZID5JA/>

Yet, God went further than just making a vivid demonstration of his handiwork, he also spoke to humanity, and gave His people, the treasure of His Word and law.

So, David moves on in Verses 7 to 11, sharing that God has not only made himself known through nature, but God has given us his Word and his Law, revealing the way we are designed to live, which will “bring joy to our heart” (v8).

This law, we read, “is perfect (v7), is right (v8), is true (v9) and therefore revives the soul.” God’s commandments which we heard today, are the minimum standard for living as one of God’s holy people.

Point 1 | Humanity’s deep awareness of failing to live up to both God’s and our own expectations reveals our deep-seated feeling of guilt.

Yet, each one of us lives with a profound knowing, we do not live up to God’s perfect standard.

Over and over again our guilt drives us to run and hide.

And, it is not only those who know God’s law, who hide in sand caves of guilt.

Paul wrote that even those who have never even heard of God’s laws, **“show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. They demonstrate that God’s law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.”** (Romans 2:14)

Guilt is the feeling that accompanies the awareness we have done something wrong or gone against what our conscience advised us.

However, we live in a society which preaches that each person should live their lives according to their own conscience – if it is right in your own eyes, then it is right. In fact, this is not a new phenomenon at all. We read that as long as Israel had no king, **“all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.”** (Judges 21:25)

That is still what our world is like - whatever you think is right, is right for you!

But, that leave us in a terrible mess. What about if your 'right' conflicts with my 'wrong' – or 'my wrong' threatens 'your right'?

It is simply not possible for each person's conscience to be the sole authority on determining what is right, perfect and pure.

David is vividly aware of this truth, which is why for five verses (v7 to 11), he explains God *alone* provides the benchmark on what should be defined as 'right' and 'wrong'. His laws *alone* are right, perfect, pure and fair and just.

So ... we are back faced with the reality that we cannot possibly live up to God's perfect standard. And again, our feeling of guilt makes us run into our sand cave.

But, as we dig and dig deeper and deeper, making our cave bigger and bigger, we begin to realise there are some common characteristics of sand caves:

Sand caves are built to cover our guilt, so that we feel we are in control of how others see us. We try enormously hard to stop people from seeing our vulnerabilities or weaknesses.

Or, we'll cover our guilt by comparing ourselves to others, saying 'well they have done much worse than I'.

Or, we'll cover our guilt by criticising others, as this makes us feel so much better about our own inadequacies.

Or, we'll cover our guilt by making excuses, 'it's not my fault, I had to do it, if they hadn't done that, I wouldn't have had to do this'.

We hide in our sand caves to run from the one we have offended or hurt, seeking somewhere in which to hide our shame.

This drive to cover and hide began in the second chapter of God's story. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God's law, they yanked some fig leaves off a nearby bush, sewed them together to cover their nakedness, and ran and hid from the presence of the Lord (Genesis 3:7)

But, regardless of our efforts to manage our guilt – and no matter for how long we put off the need to confront our guilt – eventually the Spirit of God will prompt us to confess our sin.

And so we say, “we are sorry for our sins and turn away from them”

Point 2 | Not all confession brings transformation. There is a difference between godly sorrow and self-pity.

However, you and I have lived long enough to know, just because someone says, “I am sorry”, doesn’t mean they will actually change their behaviour.

In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, (Yes, he had to write to them again), Paul explains the difference between genuine repentance and a kind of repentance that does not bring about any transformation.

He writes, **“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”** (2 Corinthians 7:10)

There is a difference between godly sorrow and self-pity.

Genuine godly sorrow which brings repentance is when we are filled with sorrow because we know our sin has fallen short of God’s perfect standard, and our failure has brought sorrow to the heart of our heavenly Father.

Like what David prayed, God’s law has acted like a warning, revealing to us that we have failed to live up to God’s right way of living (v11).

But in verse 12, David prays **“Cleanse me from my hidden faults”**. A very common hidden fault is ‘feeling sorry’ over our sin, but for all the wrong reasons. This is self-pity.

Self-pity comes when we feel bad about something we’ve done, but the sorrow we feel revolves around the painful consequence our sin caused – rather than us being sorrowful over the sin itself.

Imagine a couple come for marriage counselling. The husband has been acting like a jerk, speaking rudely, and saying hurtful comments towards his wife. His wife has put up with it long enough and is threatening to leave him if he doesn't change. During the session, the wife explains to him how his hurtful comments make her feel and how it is damaging their relationship. The husband breaks down in tears. He admits that he hasn't been a very good husband, and because he desperately wants to save the marriage, he'll promise to treat her better in the future.

For a few weeks everything is better. The wife remarks to the counsellor, 'he's really making an effort. I guess I don't need to leave him after all.'

But, as soon as the husband realises that his wife has changed her mind, he reverts to his old behaviour.

What's going on? Was his repentance genuine?

No. He was sad and sorrowful – not over how much he hurt his wife or by how his behaviour is damaging their relationship – rather he was sad and sorrowful over the prospect of the coming discomfort *to himself* and the probable disruption to *his own life*, if his wife left him.

The kind of confession that is transforming is sorrow over how our sin has grieved the heart of God, not how the consequence of our sin has brought pain to us.

Point 3 | The Secret place of the Most High is within His Son Jesus Christ. Those who hide in Christ, find perpetual forgiveness and freedom from guilt and shame.

Do you remember we talked about how our guilt drives us to cover and hide? When we do something wrong, and we feel guilty, we will run to a place where we feel safe. As children, it may be under a bed, in a cupboard, or up a tree.

As adults our hiding place is usually walled by our defence strategies to cover and justify our mistakes and failures.

So, when feelings of guilt drive us to hide, where are we to run?

Application | There is a joy that comes from living in God's hiding place: Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice

Our Heavenly Father knows that we are unable to live up to His perfect standard.

He knows that we are burdened with much guilt and shame.

In fact, we know that the purpose of the law, is to pull us towards recognising our need for a Saviour (Galatians 3:24)

Then Jesus came and said,

"Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose." (Matthew 5:17)

Jesus did not come just to teach us the law. He did not come just to be an example of how we should live. Jesus came to fulfill the law perfectly, building us a perfectly safe, strong, hiding place in which we can find forgiveness and refuge.

That's why Jesus does not ask to carry our guilt around us anymore.

As we run to the cross – we leave our guilt and shame at its foot – knowing that the cross is the sign that the door offering acceptance by our heavenly Father is open to us.

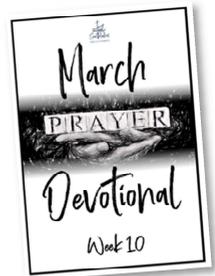
We dwell safely inside Christ's once-and-for-all sacrifice of himself – knowing that this hiding place is the **only** place in which when we ask for forgiveness, we have confidence that we have already been forgiven.

So, the door into Christ's hiding place remains open. Leave your guilt and shame outside, and then from the inside we sing,

*You are my hiding place.
You always You always fill my heart
With songs of deliverance
Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.
I will trust in You
Let the weak say, 'I am strong in the strength of the
Lord'.*

Some reflection and discussion questions

1. Read Psalm 32:6-11. Have you experienced what it is like to live in God's hiding place? What does David say are some of the privileges of hiding in God's hiding place?
2. Often we are tempted to find other hiding places, different from God's hiding place. Can you discern what some of the hiding places you are tempted to seek refuge within, particularly in times when you are feeling guilty or ashamed of yourself?
3. In today's message we looked at our efforts to 'cover' our sins and weakness from others. Can you identify what efforts you make to hide your vulnerabilities or weakness from others?
4. David reminded us today that God alone has the authority to determine what is right and wrong. His instructions alone are pure, perfect and just. Read through Psalm 19:7-11 and jot down how David describes God's commandments. Then, ask yourself if there are any of God's 10 commandments that you are tempted to rationalize, explain away, or make excuses for breaking.
5. When you ask for forgiveness (either when reciting the Lord's prayer or at other times) are you confident that your heavenly father has already forgiven you? If not, meditate on these Scriptures:
 - a. So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. (Romans 8:1-2)
 - b. let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:22)
 - c. Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God. Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything.
Dear friends, if we don't feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence. And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him. (1 John 3:19-21)



**Look out for the
March Prayer devotional → → → →**