

PSALM 51
A Prayer for Mercy

I could spend weeks on this Psalm, but I won't because after Labor Day we'll get back to Revelation, i.e. Apocalypse Now.

This morning we'll look at some key aspects of this well-known and beloved Psalm
A penitential Psalm 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143

2 Sam 11:1-12:13 gives the background story

It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. . . . Then she returned to her house. And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

He tried to cover his sin by bringing her husband Uriah home from battle so Uriah could lie with her and think it was his baby. Uriah was too noble to go in to his wife while his comrades were in battle. So David arranged to have him killed so that he could quickly marry Bathsheba and cover the sin that way.

In one of the most understated sentences of the Bible, 2 Samuel 11 ends with these words: "The thing that David had done displeased the Lord" (2 Samuel 11:27). So God sent the prophet Nathan to David with a parable that entices David to pronounce his own condemnation. Then Nathan says, "You are the man!" and asks, "Why have you despised the word of the Lord?" David breaks and confesses, "I have sinned against the Lord." Then Nathan says, astonishingly, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die" (2 Samuel 12:7-15).

(NTOE: Who was Uriah? One of David's mighty men. 2 Sam 23:39)

For the choir director. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. (Hebrew play on words – same word for Nathan coming to him as David going to Bathsheba)

1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of Your tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me.

4 Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight,
So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.

5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

6 Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.

7 Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.

9 Hide Your face from my sins And blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

11 Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit.

13 *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners will be converted to You.

14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation;

Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.

15 O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your praise.

16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering.

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

18 By Your favor do good to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem.

19 Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices, In burnt offering and whole burnt offering;

Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.

For us to really “get” this Psalm, we must see it as our Psalm as well. If we sit back and think, “I’d never do what David did” then we’ll never know the restoring grace of repentance in our own hearts. There are times when we all let something or someone take over our hearts.

Tripp – The dominant theme of Psalm 51 is not sin. The dominant theme is grace!

Nathan said, “YAHWEH HAS PUT AWAY YOUR SIN.” Those are amazing words. How can this be? The opening of the Psalm gives us some insights...

**1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness,
According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions**

Be “gracious” – a key word in THE OT. David leads with grace, not the Law. David is appealing to God’s lovingkindness (chesed) and his grace and compassion. According to your abundant “tender mercies” = a form of the word for “womb”

He is throwing himself on the mercy of the court. He is appealing to what he knows of the character of Yahweh. Have mercy according to who YOU ARE.

It is in God’s character to show mercy and compassion, to cleanse us from our sin.

His mercy leads to an act of blotting out David’s transgression. **It is God’s nature to act in a way that is beneficial to sinners.**

David begins with this appeal to God’s mercy and grace before he goes to confession. He needs to be washed thoroughly, not just one spot that is washed out.

EX: detergent stick to isolate the specific spot or stain

v. 3- 6 transition to his need –

“I know my transgression” – yada – intimate knowledge. He can’t get away from it once he sees it.

V 4 – common question – not just sin against God?? what about the many others?
Sin is always against God and He is the true ultimate victim or object of our sin. Sin is cosmic treason against our creator and the one to whom we owe everything.

God alone is the one who defines sin and evil.

We tend to call something sin just because we don't like it. When God says something is sin, we can be sure of it. Sin is that which is the opposite of the character of God.

David's Psalm is also OUR PSALM. IT rings true for us in the NT ERA. Rom 3 quotes this psalm Rom 3:4ff

2 Sam 12:9 – 'evil in His eyes'

Confession is to acknowledge as sin what God says is evil.

“Call it sin; call it forgiven, call on God.”

Only God can do for us what we can't do for ourselves – grant forgiveness

David admits his sin from the beginning because he knows that God counts us all guilty from conception. Our outward sin flows from our nature of sin. This is the result of the Fall.

We're not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners by nature.

God delights in truth and He teaches David wisdom.

We are not born with a clean slate or spiritually neutral.

EX: just do nursery duty - it's a good thing that 2 yr olds don't have positions of power or a conceal carry permit.

The only way to escape from this state of our sin is by God's gracious initiative.

v. 7-14 a string of requests that only God can fulfill...

v. 7 liturgical language from torah – purify / purge

the same verb can mean “sin” or purge or ‘de sin’ me.

Hyssop was used to absorb liquid and sprinkle – Ex 12, Lev 14, Num 19

David sees that he is ‘unclean’ and in need of mercy that will ‘de-sin’ or purge him.

White as snow – Isa 1:18 – not half clean, but fully white.

Only God can do that.

These requests all have a theme of the need to be rebuilt by God after being crushed by the reality of our own sin.

v. 8 change from brokenness to rejoicing – only God can do that

Paul Tripp- “Broken bones and rejoicing don't usually go together except when the broken bone is a metaphor for a heart that is broken over its own sin and finds healing in the grace of God”. Next David explains How the rebuilding happens...

v.9 Hide your face and blot out my iniquities

v 3 “my sin is ever before me” V. 9 “Don't let it always be before YOU.”

This request from David seems scandalous – “God just let me off the hook; forget about it.”

It would be a scandal if God simply swept the sins under the rug, but in God's economy they can only be blotted out if the penalty is paid, by David or by someone else. The sacrificial system pointed to the SOMEONE ELSE.

IT MAY seem that David is let off the hook and we might be as well if it were not for the price paid for our sin.

Jesus came to cancel out our certificate of debt – Col 2:14

13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross

v 10 Create in me a clean heart, renew a steadfast spirit

Gen 1:1 'bara' – God alone is always the subject of the verb 'create'

Renew – repair as when an altar is torn down.

v. 11 Do not cast me away from your presence, nor take your Holy Spirit from me

the rebuilding work is done by the Spirit.

Despite the weight of his sin, David does not have a sense of being cast from the presence of God. This is NOT SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, but experiential theology, i.e. how David is feeling about his relationship with God.

A FAIRLY unique use of holy spirit in the OT. David recognizes the inner work of the sanctifying Spirit.

v. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, uphold me with a willing spirit.

This text along with other Psalms are given to help us develop biblical thinking and biblical feelings. Spiritual growth and discipleship is NOT JUST about our doctrine. Spiritual growth involves our emotional life as well. Emotional maturity is part of real spiritual growth.

Piper – The Psalms were designed by God to awaken and express and shape the thoughts and feelings of Jesus' disciples.

Proper biblical feelings are downhill from biblical truth.

Biblical joy comes from a right view of biblical salvation.

This JOY is not an artificial feeling, it is a reality of a heart a heart rooted in God and His saving grace.

“The joy of the Lord is my strength” Nehemiah 8:10

Rejoice in the Lord always – Phil

Rejoice always – 1 thess 5:16

We can't effectively minister out of OUR joy because OUR joy is rooted in OUR performance. We become harsh, and judgmental if we are not rooted in the joy of God's salvation.

We need the grace of God to maintain a “willing spirit” because our own willingness is not self-sustaining. (The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak)

Our hearts are like leaky buckets and the graces tend to slowly drip out, thus we need to be renewed regularly.

We are dependent on God, something we don't like. The heart of flesh is oriented toward personal autonomy and independence. HOW DOES THAT WORK OUT FOR US?

Transition to renewed usefulness.

v. 13 He will now teach transgressors YOUR WAYS.

The foundation of David's future ministry is as a forgiven sinner. He has tasted what he will call others to taste.

It is hard to teach what we have not experienced.

v. 14

He was guilty of the blood of others.

v. 15 – David longs to no longer be muzzled by his sin but to be freed to proclaim the goodness of God.

v. 16 – the Sacrifice that God is pleased with – Isa 57:15

A Broken and contrite heart

DeMoss <https://www.reviveourhearts.com/>

Broken people are overwhelmed with a sense of their own spiritual need.

Broken people are compassionate; they can forgive much because they know how much they have been forgiven. (Do we lead with the Law or with Grace in dealing with others?)

Broken people esteem all others better than themselves.

Broken people have a dependent spirit; they recognize their need for others.

Broken people are willing to yield the right to be right.

Broken people are self-denying.

Broken people are motivated to serve others.

Broken people are motivated to be faithful and to make others a success.

Broken people are humbled by how very much they have to learn.

Broken people accept personal responsibility and can see where they are wrong in a situation.

Broken people receive criticism with a humble, open spirit.

Broken people are concerned with being real; what matters to them is not what others think but what God knows; they are willing to die to their own reputation.

Broken people, once broken, don't care who knows or who finds out; they are willing to be exposed because they have nothing to lose.

Broken people are quick to admit failure and to seek forgiveness when necessary.

Broken people realize they have need of a continual heart attitude of repentance.

Broken people continually sense their need for a fresh encounter with God and for a fresh filling of His Holy Spirit.

These are traits that should be ours and growing all through the Christian life. We never outgrow the need for a broken and contrite heart because we never outgrow our sin until we get to heaven.

The sacrificial system is not sufficient; David sees the need for an inner work.

Luther – God works from nothing. He takes our emptiness and builds something for His glory.

v. 18-19 expands from David to the community of Zion

the restoration of one sinner builds up the entire community of God.
Sin has a ripple effect in the community but so does restoration!!

One honest repentant person can change the whole flow of a relationship or the atmosphere of a family, marriage, small group or congregation.

If you don't believe me, TRY IT.

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