



The Grace of Repentance and the Joy of Restoration

Series: Special - Restoration of Pastor Eddie Strickland

Psalm 51

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The writer of this psalm, King David, was in the words of God Himself, a man after God's own heart. He was a man of deep passions, powerful worship and great praise. He was a man of deep thought and powerful action. He had learned first hand of the power, protection, and provision of God, of the deep intimacy that comes with knowing God through the trials of life. But he was also a man that for the period of an entire year became shut out to the presence of God, out of communion and fellowship with God, excluded from the worship of God, with a heart that had become calloused and hardened by sin. Out of his experience comes one of the richest of all of the Psalms, the 51st Psalm.

This psalm comes forth from the time when David plunged himself into the double sin of adultery and murder while he was king. He had walked with God for many years. He was widely known as the Sweet Singer of Israel; he had gained a reputation as a prophet, a man who understood the deep things of God; and he had established himself as the long time spiritual leader of his people. Then suddenly, toward the end of his reign, he sinned dramatically.

Read account in 2 Samuel 11-12:14. David was exposed. There was no place for him to hide. He fell on his face before God and out of that experience of confession comes this unforgettable picture of true repentance. True repentance, biblical repentance, is absolutely essential to the life and the salvation of every man. A deep realization of the guilt of our own sin, a desperate desire for God's mercy in Jesus Christ, an earnest turning away from sin is absolutely essential to salvation. No one is saved apart from it. The command of Jesus in Mark 1:15 remains **"The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."** (Mar 1:15 **ESV**) But we must also understand that repentance does not end once we are saved. As men and women redeemed by the blood of Christ, we are new creatures and yet we still sin. We still fail. Sin breaks our fellowship with God and so repentance and confession, putting our sins under the blood of Christ is an absolute necessity for every believer to enjoy the fullness of fellowship with God.

For that reason, when Martin Luther opened the Reformation by nailing the 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral, the very first of them was: "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." Luther's point was that pervasive, all of life repentance is the best sign that we are growing deeply and rapidly into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have to see sin as what it is -- as deep-rooted, thankless rebellion against God and an unwillingness to find our greatest satisfaction in Jesus Christ, who is God's greatest and best gift of His grace. If we will ever repent and turn from our sin, we must feel the weight of it and the sting of its power in our lives.

Now here is the truth. There are some of us this morning, for whom intimacy with God is missing because of the separation that our sins have caused with us and God. There are some of us who are not truly followers of Christ, having never truly repented of sin. For all of us, the specter of sin and its destructiveness is always lurking, desiring to ruin our communion and fellowship and growth in God. If it could happen to David, the man after God's own heart, it can happen to us.

David had been shut out of the worship of God, from the joy of His presence, from the experience of His love. His heart had grown cold, his misery multiplied. His heart had grown hardened and insensitive to sin. And he was without joy, because he had lost his intimate, loving fellowship with His God. He had blocked out the joy and the fellowship with the barricade of unconfessed sin. God confronted David through the prophet Nathan, and David responds by doing the only thing he can do. He throws himself on the mercy of God. See with me

David's Repentance and Cry for Mercy (v. 1-12)

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. (Psalms 51:1) God have mercy on me. That is David's only hope. He realizes that God owes Him nothing. God had given David blessing upon blessing, had made him great in the nation of Israel, had given him houses and lands, had given him great success militarily, had revealed Himself and His character, had blessed David with rich times of worship and shown him His ways and heart, had given him the unsurpassing joy of friendship

with God. And David had despised all of that. He had disregarded it all and had fallen to such a low place before God that David cried out with all of his heart – “have mercy on me.”

David, under a sense of sin, does not appeal to his works as King in Israel, does not remind God of all the psalms he had written, does not talk about his sincerity or his former track record as the reason he should be forgiven. He does not appeal to God according to his past faithfulness or exploits for God – he has nothing to barter with, nothing to point to as leverage with God. Instead He cries out to God, and casts himself at his feet, and upon his mercy; which shows the view he had of his miserable condition, and that he saw there was mercy in God, which gave him hope; and upon his bended knees, and in the exercise of faith, he asks for it. The one thing that David needs is mercy from God.

He asks for mercy according to God’s steadfast love. That is the Hebrew word for covenant love – *hesed* – it is the covenantal love that God has for those who are His, for His children that we do not earn and do not deserve. That the basis of his plea.

He throws himself on the Lord and he pleads...blot out my transgressions. That word “transgressions” is the Hebrew word “*pesha*” which means serious rebellion, high-handed, inexcusable sin. David is admitting the grave nature of what he has done, he knows the depth of his sin and he owns it. By his sin David has said to God: “God, your holiness does not matter. Your glory is unimportant; your promises are not trustworthy; your words are weightless; your commands trivial; your blessings insufficient. You are not worthy of my love or my obedience.” We may never say that with our lips, but our sin says the same thing. David knew and felt the seriousness of his sin and he also knows that only God can remove the stain of his sins, only God can blot out, only God can erase, only God can remove it. He continues in verse 2...

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! (Psalms 51:2)

“Wash me again and again, - cause my washings to be multiplied.” My stain is deep. The word he uses for wash means “to trample with the feet.” This word was often used of a woman first saturating a garment with lye soap and then treading it under foot on a rock, beating and pummeling it as the rushing waters poured over it. One can almost hear David, tearfully praying: “Gracious Lord, do that to my spirit! My sin is like a deep-dyed stain that has soiled the fabric of my soul, and no ordinary soap or detergent, far less any good works I might perform,

can remove it. My transgressions are like ground-in dirt. Lord, scrub me clean by your mercy and grace!” Trample my sin out of me, wash me thoroughly. David no longer desires for his sin to be covered up or hidden. No longer is he laboring to protect his reputation. He realizes that God must wash him. Personal reformation was not enough. Personal resolutions to do better are not enough. Putting a religious veneer over his sin plagued soul will not help him. He needs to be washed by God. Why does David cry out like this? Why is he so desperate? Here is why.

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. (Psalms 51:3)

His sin was always in his face. He saw it in Bathsheba’s eyes, in the cynical looks of Joab, in the whispers of his servants. His sin was always there – obscuring God, clouding worship, like a veil over his heart when he looked at the Word of God, destroying communion with God, sapping his strength, stealing his joy, silencing his lips from praise and making a wasteland of his soul and life.

And here is a frank and full acknowledgment of sin. David calls it – my sin, my transgressions – mine. David owns his sin; he is convicted of his sin. You see it in what he says next,

Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. (Psalms 51:4)

It is not that he does not understand that others have been damaged by his sin. There is the woman, Bathsheba; her reputation was sullied, her character blasted, her marriage broken, her husband murdered, and her own heart grieved by the death of the child that was born, all because of David's sin. There is the man, Uriah, whose life was brought to a sudden and bloody end because of David's sin. He sinned against the nation of Israel, against Joab. But here’s the thing. But David now sees that ultimately sin is against God. It is God's glory that has been violated, His love that has been offended. He has violated the holiness and glory of God. He has declared that God is not as important to him as his own sinful pleasure, his own wants. He has robbed God of His glory... David had destroyed the holiness of marriage, treated God as if He were a fool by hiding his sin, murdered a man made in God’s image and profaned the holiness of God. Sin is an attack on God. His sin was first and foremost an offence against God and he knew it. David doesn’t try to vindicate himself, rather he vindicates God. He says to God, in essence, “You would be right to damn me. That is what I deserve. No one could call you unjust if you judged me.” In fact, far from trying to vindicate himself, David says

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. (Psalms 51:5)

David is realizing that sin is not just some little thing, not just a surface problem, not something that can be taken lightly, but it is woven into him. David confesses that the source of sin is in our souls, not our surroundings. David sees that his sin is not simply confined to his actions but

reaches deep into his heart. He is not using his inner corruption as an excuse for why he acts the way he does. He's confessing that sin is at the core of who he is. But what does God want?

Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. (Psalms 51:6) God wants truth, he wants holiness, he wants integrity in the inner man, in his heart. He wants us to be whole and holy, real, genuine and unfeigned. God is not big on the outside, God looks at the heart. Do you see that beloved? We are so concerned about appearances, about looking one way or another. We want to keep up appearances. God wants truth in our inner man, he wants us to be genuine and that means confession and repentance, it demands honesty before God. God is not impressed by outward show, by great demonstration of religiosity, by swelling words, by great acts of sacrifice. God's desire is truth and holiness in the inner man. True repentance embraces truth in the heart.

The reason that so many of us stop short of the fullness of God, the reason that we do not experience the manifest presence of God, that we do not have the joy of God's fellowship is that we are so caught up with our appearances that we never consider the darkness of our hearts. We are never real with God. David was real about his sin. Are we? Or do we stumble along because we are so resistant to admitting our sin, or so accustomed to it that we are oblivious to the sin that strangles us? Thank God for Nathan, thank God for a man that brought David face to face with what was destroying him. What sin do you need to name today and deal with today that you have been trying to hide, trying to tame?

Apathy toward God, anger, anxiety, bitterness, conceit, covetousness, a critical tongue, deceitfulness, envy, false modesty, false piety, greed, hatred, lust, idolatry, impure thoughts, jealousy, laziness, materialism, profanity, gossip, rebellion to authority and a refusal to submit, resentment, self-centeredness, self-confidence, self-gratification, self-hatred, self-indulgence, self-justification, self-pity, self-reliance, self-righteousness, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, sensuality, unforgiveness, lovelessness?

Name it today. Own it today. Confess it today. Quit hiding your sin, but admit it to God. David did and he found cleansing, he found forgiveness.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (Psalms 51:7) Purge me with hyssop. David was contaminated and he knew it. He knew of nothing on earth that could cleanse a sin-stained soul. There was no ritual, no religion, no resolve of his will...only God could purify him. Literally the word is "de-sin" me. When he speaks of hyssop, he is referring to the small plant that grew in Israel that was used as a small brush. In the ceremonies in the temple it was used to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifices on the mercy seat, it was used to sprinkle those who had been cleansed of leprosy or who had been defiled by a dead body. It was hyssop drenched with blood that was used to enact the covenant of God with his people.

David prayed that what blood soaked hyssop did for ceremonially for the leper, God would do for his soul. Though he did not know the name of the one whose blood can bring that cleansing, we do...Jesus Christ, the only Son of God. This blood of the sacrifice that David wants to cleanse him prefigures the blood of Jesus Christ. Only the blood of Jesus Christ applied to us cleanses us from sin. Just like David, the hope that drives our repentance is that God will be gracious and forgive us of sin and the only way that God can forgive us once for all and day by day is by the blood of Jesus Christ that satisfies the wrath of God against sin. Our only hope of forgiveness once and for all and day by day is the blood of Christ shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. **But if we will walk in the light**, if we will confess our sin, own it, hate it, and turn from it to God then **we have fellowship with God and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)** And that fellowship is what David longs for. He cries out...

Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. (Psalms 51:8-9) Speak to me again God. Give me the joy and gladness of hearing your voice once again. Let me know the sweet relief of your forgiveness spoken to my soul and grant me to revel in intimacy with you once more. Restore the song to my soul, give me again the spiritual tenderness that once made it possible for me to hear you and delight in your fellowship. Let me enjoy you again. He has felt that separation and now David longs to enjoy God again.

Let me be the one who dances on the very bones that you have broken. Oh, cleanse me God and draw near to me once more. David has known the discipline of God. God has broken him under the weight of his sin. God has disciplined David to bring him to Himself. He will not allow David to continue in sin as he had been. He will not allow his own to find any lasting pleasure in sin but disciplines us to break us and bring us to Himself so that He can be our lasting joy. So David is saying, My soul has been dry. But you are the fountain of life. In your presence is the fullness of joy and at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Turn your face away from my sin and blot it all out so that I can rejoice in you again. But David asks for even more...

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. (Psalms 51:10)

Create is that Hebrew word “bara” which is used only of God in the OT. It is the word that is used to describe the creation of the world from nothingness. David asks God for a new heart, one that loves Him, follows Him, serves Him, blesses Him, is obedient to Him. He is asking for nothing short of a miracle. He did not just want to have his old heart changed. It was not just

refurbishing of his life that David desired, but a new nature, a new heart. Renew a right spirit, he says. In other words, give me a steadfast, determined heart that will love you and choose you over the fleeting pleasures of sin in this world. Lacking steadfastness, frequently failing, cyclically being weak in the same way over and over again, are also the concerns of David's prayer. He's asking God the Creator to bring into being something that never existed before: a steadfast spirit. Give me a spirit set on you. Give me a will that wants to do what you want me to do even though I may struggle at times. Change me.

Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. (Psalms 51:11)

Don't cast me off as a lost cause. Don't withdraw yourself from me. He had experienced the heaviness of life apart from the presence of God and he never wanted to experience it again. David is recoiling from what he knows only too well to be the consequence of an unclean heart – separation from God, to be cut off from the Lord and it is the worst fate imaginable. Instead, he says,

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. (Psalms 51:12)

Put back in my heart the gladness and joy of being yours. David desires to know the joy of being forgiven and knowing it. His desire is to rejoice before the Lord freely and fully again. He wants to know the supreme joy and blessedness of being white as snow, blameless before the Lord. Give me back the joy that is found only in you and following you, and knowing you, and keep me in it, uphold me with a willing spirit. Complete your cleansing and forgiveness of me and strengthen me not to stray. David is asking for both forgiving and sustaining grace and the reason is clear as we look at

The Joy of Forgiveness and Fruit of Grace (v. 13-19) Out of this forgiveness and restoration and joy comes the fruit of such grace:

Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. (Psalms 51:13) I will teach from my own experience the ways of God. I will tell others all about your ways – your grace, your mercy, your steadfast love, your forgiving ways with repentant sinners. David would worship God by speaking of His glorious ways. Notice that David does not talk about religion, or the temple, but the nature of God. From the depths of a joy-filled, forgiven heart he will proclaim the character and the nature and salvation of God. David says, "I will teach your

ways. I will say what I know is true of God-his commitment to people, his unfailing love, his power. I will speak of God's ways, and outsiders will want to hear it, and their lives will be transformed." Because of your steadfast love, the fullness of your forgiveness, your restoration of my soul and the joy you are to my heart I will declare your name and make you name glorious before sinners who need you and they will come. His is a worshipping soul now...

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. (Psalm 51:14-15) David is vowing to the Lord that if He will deliver David from his bloodguiltiness, from his sin that has no human remedy, then his lips, long sealed with the shame of his sin will pour forth in praise to God. His passion will no longer be for sin but for preaching the righteousness of God, and praising the grace of God and for ministering to God and man. David longs to sing of God's glory – his life a testimony of praise to God. That is what truly repentant and truly forgiven hearts are like. They cannot be silenced.

David's worship is from the heart. He is not just mouthing the words. He is singing with joy. His is a heart set free. His worship will not be a mere form; it will be real. Every song sung, every psalm read, every prayer uttered will not be a mechanical perfunctory repetition of words but the joyous expression of a heart that has been cleansed and set free. His confession will no longer be of sin, but of the God who has forgiven and cleansed and restored him. Confession brings fellowship with God, the anointing of His Spirit and true joy in our lives. Confession and brokenness is the pathway to true worship. It is not something to be avoided but a gift to be embraced. Then David says:

For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (Psalms 51:16-17) David has come to see the truth clearly. He sees what counts with God. It is not religious ritual, going through the motions of worship and sacrifice, not great swelling words...but rather it is true repentance born of faith and humility and brokenness that casts itself upon God, that finds its hope only in God's mercy. It is the heart of a man or a woman that stops hiding sin or putting on a false front and pretending all is well and instead owns sin and cries out for mercy and grace. It is being transparent with God, owning our sin, admitting it, confessing our inability to atone for it or cover it and out of hatred for sin crying out to God to cover it with the blood of His dear son.

I cannot begin to stress how vital to life true repentance really is. Church, beloved of God in Christ, we must ask ourselves sincerely and honestly – is there unrepentant sin in my life? What sin have I been laboring to cover up, to hide, hoping that no one will see?

Examine your worship. Is it sincere? Your devotional life, spending time with God in His Word and in prayer – is it fruitful? Is Christ real to you? Is there something in your life that is breaking that fellowship? Don't ignore it and think that time will fix it, that it will just go away on its own. Deal with it. Confess it. Call your sin what it is. Repent of it and cry out to God for mercy in repentance and faith and find the joy of God's salvation restored to you. Find the freedom that David found to be the result.

And to the one who is not in Christ, who has not repented and believed the gospel...Do you see how desperate your situation is? Do you see how desperately you need to repent and place your faith in Jesus Christ for the eternal forgiveness of your sins? This is no small thing. Your sins have separated you from God and have earned for you eternal death in hell forever separated from God.

Will you see the magnitude of your sin against the holy God? Will you feel the weight of your sin upon your soul? Will you believe the gospel? Turn from your sin, trust in Christ alone for salvation and receive Him as your Savior and Lord.

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