

Psalm 51

For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you. Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Dear friends in our forgiving God and Savior,

Deceiver. Adulterer. Murderer. That's pretty bad for a king. If your image of a king is shaped by *Game of Thrones* or any number of movies, you might just think that's par for the course, but imagine the king of God's people, the king of Israel, behaving like that! It's not printed in your worship folder, but these are the words recorded as introductory to Psalm 51: ***A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.***

You can look up the sordid details of the story (recorded in 2 Samuel) if you want, but here's the short story: King David slept with another man's wife and then, after finding out she was pregnant by him, had her honorable soldier-husband killed in battle in a most disgusting and conniving way so that no questions would be asked. No husband, no scandal when he took the man's wife as his own.

Though he thought he had covered up his numerous sins, God saw all that David had done and he was not happy with the man he had anointed to be king of his people. You and I typically do not take it well when someone points out our sin. We get defensive, angry, and maybe even accuse the person of not being perfect themselves. After hearing about David, I think you'll realize this morning how foolish we are when we behave that way. The loving action of God was sending his prophet Nathan to the king to confront him with his sin. Nathan's tact is impressive and his boldness before the king remarkable. And through him, God accomplished a great thing: David's heart was turned to repentance and he found forgiveness that restored his salvation.

You and I are blessed to have before us the fruit of David's repentance, the evidence of a contrite heart, and the assurance of forgiveness that comes from the God of all grace. This psalm written by David has influenced the worship of Christians for centuries, so some of the words may be familiar to us because we have said them or sung them in church services. Many of you, no doubt, will recognize other verses as well. The words of the forgiven king describe for us how

THE HEART OF THE FORGIVEN

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| 1. Repents of its Sin | (1-11) |
| 2. Finds Joy in Forgiveness | (12, 14-19) |
| 3. Wants to Help Others Do the Same | (13) |

I'm going to read the first 11 verses of Psalm 51 and I would like you to not only think of David's horrible sins that brought dreadful consequences for him, for others around him, and for all of God's people—I would like you to also consider your sins. Think about the ways you have sinned against the holy God, maybe even ways that only you know. Or as with David's case, sins that only you and a few others know anything about.

Either follow along in the worship folder or listen closely as I read them...and pray them about yourself in your heart:

- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.**
- ² Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.**
- ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.**
- ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.**
- ⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.**
- ⁶ Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.**
- ⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.**
- ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.**
- ⁹ Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.**
- ¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.**
- ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.**

Have you ever prayed that intently about your sin? Have you ever laid out your heart like that before the God who judges all? Perhaps you have. But it may not be often because we may not always realize that *any* sin on our part—not just things like adultery and murder—any sin separates us from God and leads to eternal death. Like David, maybe we need someone to bring it to our attention. Nathan made the king realize his sins before the righteous God and Judge. David was struck to the heart and pleaded with God to take his sins away. He asked for mercy, for love, for compassion. It's all he could do! He had nothing to offer! So he begged. **Blot out my transgressions...wash away all my iniquity...cleanse me from my sin...hide your face from my sins...do not cast me from your presence...**

He even acknowledged the sin that was part of who he was: **Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.** He was admitting what we know from other places in Scripture as well: every human being inherits sin and it goes back to the first two sinful people, Adam and Eve. So not only are our sinful actions appalling before God, so is our natural condition. And though, like David, we are freed from the control of our sinful nature because we are new creations by faith in God, we sometimes—also like David—allow our sinful nature regain control.

And when it happens—no matter what the sin—we need to come before God in deep humility and repentance. And we must know what David knew and trust it like he trusted it. David knew that all he could do was appeal to the grace of God, to his undeserved love. He knew that was the only way to be forgiven for all he had done. And as you and I read this, we realize that there has only ever been one way to be forgiven and saved eternally. It was never by doing good things, never by giving enough money, never by keeping enough laws. Nothing else could pay the penalty for sin but Jesus Christ. And though David did not see the promised Savior during his lifetime, his hope was in the Savior who would come and atone for his sins. Whether people lived long before he came or live long after he died and rose, faith in Jesus is the only way to have sins blotted out and washed away. It was true for David and it is true for you and me. The believing heart that repents of its sin finds forgiveness from the Savior-God.

And THE HEART OF THE FORGIVEN FINDS JOY IN THE FORGIVENESS it receives. Maybe you know the feeling David had after being forgiven for so much. After being confronted with his sin by the prophet, **David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” Nathan replied, “The LORD has taken away your sin (2 Samuel 12:13).”** Imagine the relief! Or maybe you don’t need to. If you realize the extent of your sin, how many sins you have piled up—and how many you don’t even know you committed—if you have an inkling and you know that Jesus has paid for every one and you are forgiven—totally, completely, then you should also have that same sense of relief! That relief leads to joy and singing and praising God, to a change of heart, to offerings of all kinds made to God with a happy and thankful heart. King David expressed that relief in this joyful way:

¹² **Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.**

¹³ **Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.**

¹⁴ **Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.**

¹⁵ **O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.**

¹⁶ **You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.**

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

¹⁸ **In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem.**

¹⁹ **Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar.**

We have sinned much and we have been forgiven much—not because of our sacrifices and offerings to God, but because of the sacrifice of our Savior's life, the offering of sinless perfection on the cross of Calvary. Just as Christ was raised from the dead in victory, our forgiveness raises us up to a life of joy and the certain expectation of victory on our last day.

What does the FORGIVEN HEART that finds overwhelming grace and forgiveness from the Lord also do? It does what David promised God he would do: **Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.**

THE HEART OF THE FORGIVEN REPENTS OF ITS SIN, FINDS JOY IN FORGIVENESS and WANTS TO HELP OTHERS DO THE SAME.

When you think about how God instructs you to go and make disciples of all nations and work as his witnesses and act as his ambassadors and call Christians to repentance as Nathan did for David—and then you consider your faith life—how do you stack up next to God's expectations? Is it fair to say that we may not be carrying out God's will all the time? Repentance over that finds forgiveness in Jesus too. And in a forgiven and joyful state, we are prepared to see David's example and desire to do the same.

We want others to find the joy that comes from God's forgiveness don't we? Our forgiven hearts feel as God feels, wanting everyone to be saved, right? We know that sin separates from God and in a state of unrepentance, a person is headed toward eternal death. We don't want that for anyone. The connection of faith to life here is that THE HEART OF THE FORGIVEN WANTS TO HELP OTHERS find forgiveness in Jesus and the eternal life in heaven that results from that!

So I guess the question is, "How are you going to do what David did?" Will you share what God says about sin and what he says about forgiveness through Jesus as eagerly as you share your children's pictures, your home business, your pride in your sports teams and virtually anything else on Facebook? Is there a person you know who lives without faith in Christ? Do you know a Christian who is not living as a Christian?

You and I actually get two good examples this morning. Nathan, who confronted David with his sin—and was God's instrument in saving David's soul—and David, who knew what it was to be forgiven and wanted to tell others how they could find forgiveness with God also! This is what Christians do. I pray that you comprehend how grievous your sin is before God, how great his forgiveness in Jesus is that it washes it all away, and that you have a true desire to help others find the relief and joy you have experienced by the grace of God. May the Holy Spirit of God work in our hearts and open our lips that our mouths may declare his praise! Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.