

# King David and Sin

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now, in 1517, Johann Tetzel traveled around Germany selling indulgences in order to fund the building of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

And he was quite the salesman. People flocked to him from miles around because he taught that if you gave him money, then you could have your sins forgiven. You could even get time off purgatory. You could get time off of your relative's time in purgatory. He even supposedly came up with that catchy jingle, as soon as a coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.

And in response, on October 31st, Martin Luther walked to the doors of a castle church in Wittenberg and nailed his famous 95 theses to the church door, challenging the sale of indulgences.

Now, the truth is that event was probably not nearly as dramatic as it may seem in the mythology of Protestantism. Nobody would have taken much interest because the church door is basically the bulletin board for the entire town.

[ 1 : 12 ] Also, Luther probably didn't nail his 95 theses. He probably glued them to the door, which is much less dramatic. And contrary to popular belief, Luther did not think he was changing church history or breaking with the Catholic Church.

But that event is still what we traditionally say was the start of the Reformation. And what drove Martin Luther to the church doors that day in Wittenberg was a certain understanding of the Christian life.

And you can see that in Martin Luther's very first thesis. When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said repent, he intended the entire life of believers should be one of repentance.

Luther correctly understood that repentance wasn't just a matter of paying money or even mechanically saying a few prayers. Instead, it is something that all Christians do all the time. It's not just for a season of life. It is a way of life. And if that is true, and it is, then repentance is something that Christians need to learn to do well.

[ 2 : 25 ] And that is why we're going to look at Psalm 51 today. It is one of the several penitential psalms. It is really probably the most famous and greatest of those.

And that's not just because it has some of the most powerful language, some of the most memorable language of any psalm. It's also probably because we know so much about the context. We know about so much about what went into that psalm because the Bible goes into so much detail in 2 Samuel 11 and 12. We get to know in very precise details what it was like for David in the lowest point of his spiritual life.

How he committed adultery with Bathsheba and tried to cover it up even by committing murder. We see him commit sins that are so heinous it's almost like they're out of a tabloid. And that makes this the perfect psalm for us to understand what repentance is and what we should be doing.

And that might seem strange, but if you want to learn how to do something, you go to an expert. If you are running a business and you want to learn how to run a business better, you don't go to the local child who runs a lemonade stand.

[ 3 : 38 ] You go to a successful business leader, perhaps even a CEO. And the Bible presents David not merely as a great sinner, but as a master repentant.

And what we're doing today is following in the footsteps of our father in the faith, David, as he teaches us by example. And what I want us to see today are three things that he does.

I first want us to see how he confesses his sin. Second, how he pleads with God. And three, how he seeks God. And let's start with that first point, how he confesses his sin.

David begins his prayer by declaring that he needs mercy and that he needs to be washed. But he then goes into detail why in verses three to six, where he is confessing his sin to God. And what I want you to notice is that he confesses with a sense of guilt. David doesn't just abstractly recognize that he has sinned, that he has broken some abstract law out there somewhere.

[ 4 : 43 ] He feels that he is guilty. He feels that he is worthy of judgment. As he says in verse three, my sin is always before me.

What he's saying there is that his sin is constantly before him. It's crying out day and night, condemning him. Wherever he goes, he sees it.

And he cannot escape it. It's like that famous scene from Macbeth. After Lady Macbeth kills King Duncan, she's wracked with guilt.

Even when she falls asleep, her servants see her sleepwalking through the castle, rubbing her hand, convinced that there is still a spot of blood there.

And they hear her muttering out, out, trying to wash away that sin that is there on her palm. And it's the same way with David.

[ 5 : 39 ] He may not be descending into madness like Lady Macbeth, but he feels the same burden of guilt. And it is something he knows he cannot wash away. Perhaps you've heard someone use the expression, I can feel it in my bones.

That's what that means is that you can just feel it. It's deep inside you. There's an ache there. Well, that's the same language David uses in verse eight, where he says his bones have been broken. He feels as if something inside him is broken when he is convicted of this sin. He knows he can't do something about it. There's something deep inside him that is aching. And like David, we are called to feel the same guilt for our sin.

We should have our consciences pricked. Sometimes it should even feel like they've been stabbed. We need to see our sin in the dock condemning us in the courtroom.

Because if sin doesn't hurt, you will never go to God in prayer. And that means you will never think that highly of your Savior. Because you've never sunk deeply into the mud.

[ 6 : 51 ] And in the words of the Valley of Vision, the way up is the way down. If you want to raise your head in assurance of pardon, it first needs to be laid low in guilt.

Now, I'm not saying that Christians need to live in an existential, eternal torment. Far from it. But being a Christian doesn't mean that your conscience disappears. It means there is relief for your conscience.

And that you can have peace, true peace with God. But Christians are still called to take sin seriously. Indeed, more seriously than before we were saved. And part of the reason why is in verse 4.

Where David says his sense of guilt isn't just driven by the heinousness of the sin that he has committed, but who he has committed it against.

He says, I have sinned against you, God. He even goes so far as to say, against you, you only have I sinned. Now, that might make you pause.

[ 7 : 54 ] How can David possibly say those words? That he has only sinned against God. And that's a reasonable reaction.

That is a hyperbole on David's part. It is an overstatement. David understands that he has sinned against Bathsheba. That he has sinned against Uriah. That he has really sinned against the whole nation of Israel.

This is a figure of speech. He has sinned against the whole nation of Israel. David isn't a sociopath who is completely oblivious to the chaos that he has caused. He's aware of it. But, even though it is a hyperbole, I don't want you to react to that line and to say, oh, David, you're such a poet.

Here you are being a little overdramatic in a psalm. Don't have that reaction because this is a godly hyperbole. It's placed here in Scripture for a reason. David is saying the same thing Joseph did.

Joseph said in Genesis 39. When Potiphar's wife tried to convince him to sleep with her, he says, Your husband has not kept anything from me except you because you are his wife.

[ 8 : 59 ] How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? The focus is not on Potiphar. The focus is on God. And what Joseph and David both recognize is that our sin is chiefly and ultimately against God himself.

Without that, you don't have true biblical repentance. If you're only repenting of how much you've sinned against your neighbor, then you've only barely begun to repent.

You need to go further. You need to take your sin more seriously. How we normally try to judge the severity of our sin is based on how much it hurts those around us. You know, when you sin against someone in your family, against your spouse, against your children, you get to look in their eyes and you get to see there's pain there.

You get to measure the level of pain. You get to know how much that burst of anger hurt, how much that lie hurt, how much your selfishness hurts them. But that's a woefully inadequate in order to really get a grasp of how bad your sin is.

That's like looking at the sun in the sky and trying to measure it with your thumb. You don't get anywhere close to the true size of your sin. If you want to see the greatness of your sins, then you need to look at God, who is most offended.

[10:19] If you haven't just sinned, because you haven't just sinned against a finite sinful creature, you have sinned against the infinite, perfect, holy creator of the universe. You have sinned against the one who gave you life and preserves you moment by moment.

And you've used the very breath he has given you to break his law and spit in his face. He is the one who has shown you mercy after mercy, even sending his own son into the world to die for sinners.

And it is this vertical dimension that is so vital to true repentance. You need to look up to God, to the one who is not only holy, but is holiness itself.

If you look at him, you will begin to recognize that you haven't just sinned, but that you are a sinner. You begin to say with David, verse 5, Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Because you have the same problem that every single person has had, stretching all the way back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. You have what the theologians call original sin.

[11:31] You are guilty from the womb before God, and every part of you is corrupted by sin. There's no secret part of your soul which is spotless. All of it is affected in some way by sin.

That's why when you sin, it's not a surprise. It's actually the most natural thing in the world for you to sin. It's like breathing. And when you begin to see that, you begin to realize that there is no hope for you except in the arms of Jesus.

It's not that you went wrong somewhere in your life. You just took a wrong turn or two. It's that you started going in the wrong direction. You've continued going in the direction.

And then you can finally say with David, You are right. Your judgment is just. We need to capture a sense of that sinfulness of sin by feeling the guilt of our sin and how we have sinned against a holy God.

Because then there's finally no place except Jesus. We don't bring any justification, any self-justification or self-righteousness with us when we repent. We don't bring our money or our best works.

[12:38] What we bring to God is what David says in verse 17. A broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart. To bring him anything less is impossible.

And to bring him anything more is worse than nothing. And if you feel the guilt of your sin, then realize that is a gift from God. But don't torture yourself.

Turn to Jesus. He stands, his arms are open wide, and he has come to save sinners, not the righteous. And if you feel the guilt of your sin, then he calls to you, repent and believe, and he will give you rest.

But this is something that mature Christians need too. This is not just a song for unbelievers. This is a song for believers too. Now it's true that Christians are not supposed to walk around every single moment of every single day filled with guilt, you know, a feeling so poignantly how they have committed a sin last week and they're just constantly wracked by it.

We're chiefly supposed to look at Jesus and how he has saved us and we're supposed to rejoice in that. Robert Murray McShane was right when he said, for every look at yourself, take ten looks at Jesus.

[13:56] That's a good proportion, really. But there is the danger of being complacent about sin, even for Christians. And if you realize that you can sin without feeling very much at all, or that you have gone so long without spending any time looking at yourself, considering your own sinfulness, then that's a problem.

Because if you don't take that one look at yourself and your own sinfulness, then you'll find that you won't see the glory of Christ nearly as well. It will get a little dimmer.

You won't understand the wonder of what it means for him to be made sin who knew no sin. And it's probably at that moment when you are most in danger of falling into sin like David did.

And what you need in those moments is to rediscover a sense of sin, a sense of the sinfulness of sin, and what it means for Jesus to be your Savior by seeing what it is that he has saved you from. But the second thing I want you to see is how after confessing his sin, he begins to plead with God for forgiveness in verse 7. But first, notice the basis upon which he pleads with God, all the way back in verse 1.

[15:10] Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love. He is praying based upon God's character, upon his unfailing love.

And by that he means his covenantal faithfulness. We don't just approach a God in prayer, hoping that maybe he'll listen to my prayer if I just pray just well enough, just for today.

Maybe he'll forgive me. Prayer is not the art of the deal. We go before our God in prayer. Our God who is already born with his people, his stiff-necked people from generation to generation for millennia.

And we come to him in light of Lamentations 3 when it says, The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning.

Great is your faithfulness. On this side of the cross, we even get to see that our God has sent his own son into the world to die upon the cross for sinners.

[16:11] And so, like Hebrews 10.22 says, We should have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus. We know that a way has been opened up to God for sinners by God himself.

And we can come before him and pray. That doesn't mean we pray flippantly, but it does mean we pray confidently before our God. And we pray like David does upon God's own character and promises.

But what David begins to confidently plead to his covenantal God for is forgiveness. And you can see that in verse 7. Cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean.

David is alluding to a really obscure part of his Bible. It's all the way back in Leviticus 14, which has a ritual for what you do to cleanse a sinner, cleanse a leper who has been cured.

How that leper who has been sent out of the covenant community because of his sickness and has to live outside of the camp. Once they're healed, how do they get back in? Well, you do this ritual.

And then they're finally able to come back into the camp.

[17:17] And I want you to realize something. This is an obscure chapter of Scripture because it almost never gets used. Because healing lepers is a miracle. You know, you might think lepers get healed all the time.

In the Old Testament, there are only two. There's Naaman and there's Miriam. That's it. And so when Jesus starts healing lepers, all the Levites start having to turn through their book and find the one part of Leviticus they never use.

That's what David is alluding to. Something that only God can do. And what you do in that ritual is you take a bird, you kill it, you drain its blood into a bowl. The priest takes a branch of hyssop, dips it in, and sprinkles it seven times on the former leper.

And as soon as that is done, the priest then declares, you are clean. What David is saying there, Lord, I need you to purge me with hyssop like that.

I need you to cleanse me. If you wash me in the blood of a sacrifice, I will be clean. I will be whiter than snow. It's only something God can do. And it's something that only the blood of a sacrifice can do.

[18:25] Something else needs to take our sin away and take the punishment for our sin. That's precisely what we ask God for when we repent. We ask for blood to be applied to us.

We don't ask for the blood of bulls and goats or even birds to be applied to us. We ask for the blood of Jesus to be applied to us. The blood that all the sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed to.

Because He is the one sacrifice that is sufficient for our sins. And we know that if we're just washed in that blood, really if we're just sprinkled in that blood, our very soul becomes clean and God will hide His face from our sins and they are blotted out forever.

That is blood that is shed for you. The entire reason He took on flesh was so that it could be ripped and torn on your behalf. And Jesus, even now, at the right hand of God the Father, saying, My

blood is for sinners.

And the only thing you need to do is pray, Lord, I trust in Jesus and I ask that His blood would be applied to me. That is a bold prayer. To ask that the blood of God would be applied to you.

[ 19 : 39 ] But what you're doing is you're taking hold of a promise by faith that God has freely offered. The promise of the Gospel. And then you will finally be forgiven and have joy and gladness.

You'll have your broken bones healed. This is something you must pray. Because once your consciences are convicted like David's is in the first part of this psalm, there's no other relief except in Jesus.

But there is relief. True joy in Him. But this leads us to our third and final point. We've seen how David confesses his sin and pleads for forgiveness.

But I also want you to see how David seeks God. How he seeks God. David is not content simply asking for forgiveness.

He asks for more. He asks to be renewed by God in verse 10. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. He wants his heart and soul to be renewed by God.

[ 20 : 44 ] Recreated so that they are completely pure. David doesn't just want to be forgiven. He wants to be holy. He doesn't just want the guilt of sin to be removed. He wants the power of sin to be broken.

Really what he's asking for is justification and sanctification. The two things that go hand in hand in the Christian life. And he's asking for both in this psalm. And the reason I think he asks for this is because David's goal is not just to be forgiven, not punished.

His goal is to be with God and to enjoy Him forever. You can see that in verses 11 and 12. Do not cast me away 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. All of David's requests from verse 7 forward are leading to that. Leading to those verses.

He wants to be near God. He wants to have God's Spirit bless him to live a life of doxological joy before God. Because for David, the idea that you can be forgiven but not be near God, that is a fate worse than death.

[ 21 : 54 ] You want to be near God. He wants that. That is what true repentance looks like. True repentance, it's not just turning away from your sin. It is turning to God and seeking His face.

Anything less is a false repentance. You can't repent while having every intention of keeping an idol in your heart, having some portion of it that's just yours and not God's.

That's not the way it works. That's an abuse of God's grace. And once you've been washed in the blood of Christ, you desire to be like Him. You desire to obey Him.

And anything less than that is really you seeking yourself, not God, when you repent. And where you really get to see David's heart for seeking God is at the end of this psalm.

David ends this psalm by talking about worship. We're just going to quickly look from verse 13 and following. David says he's going to evangelize sinners by telling them what God has done.

[ 22 : 56 ] As Matthew Henry says, penitents are preachers. And David cannot rest without letting other sinners know about what God has done in his life and let them repent and praise God as well.

And then in verse 14, he says that he's going to sing about God's righteousness. The righteousness of God. I want you to notice that. The very thing that condemns David for his sin is the very thing he will praise God for once he is forgiven and restored.

And going quickly down to verse 19, we can see that the sacrifices that displeased God in verse 16 have suddenly become pleasing to God because they are offered with a contrite heart, with a broken heart, with a repentant heart.

Really where David wants to be, he wants to be in the sanctuary where we are today. He wants to be here, enjoying worship, because he knows that's where he meets God. That's where he communes with Him.

And it's the same with us today. We gather as the people of God every Lord's Day and we long to hear God's Word preached and to sing God's praises because this is the closest we get to heaven, this side of glory.

[ 24 : 08 ] God has promised to meet with His people here. Even here today. He has promised to bless us with His Spirit and fill us with the joy of salvation. And I think too often we repent without thinking about that.

