

Psalm 51 - Guilt and Redemption

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Preacher: David Calderwood

[0 : 00] Reading in Psalm 51, this is a psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him after he'd gone into Bathsheba and this is his response.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love. According to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me.

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.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother's conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

[1 : 13] Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. 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. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from blood guiltiness, 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 for you will not delight in sacrifice or I would give it and you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

[2 : 36] The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Do good to Zion in your good pleasure. Build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then you will delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings.

Then bulls will be offered on your altar. Thanks, Catherine.

So this is the time now for kids of creche age up to year two. This is the awesome display. Crouch age to year two. We'll go out to our Sunday school program and we're going to stand and sing our next song, Judge of the Secrets, and then David will come and bring the message to us.

Thank you. Good morning, everyone.

[4 : 01] If you're a visitor here this morning, my name's David. I'm one of the pastors. It would be hard to imagine a more attention-grabbing, a more confronting heading than we get in Psalm 51.

Just look at the heading. In the English Bible, it says, when Nathan the prophet went to King David after he had gone into Bathsheba.

Literally, in the Hebrew, it says, after David had entered into Bathsheba. This is a poem about guilt and redemption.

So, immediately, it's a song our society is likely to reject because, on the whole, our society now rejects the concept of guilt.

Guilt is construed these days to be an evil in itself. Oftentimes, it's said to be the construct of religions, something that's used to control people.

[5 : 34] Historically, it's not been like that. Historically, guilt has been accepted as the proper working of conscience, which confronts us internally with our wrongdoings.

But modern wisdom is moving to demand that people should be guilt-free in any absolute moral sense.

And the cry of society now is so commonly, don't judge me. And behind that statement is another statement that says, well, look, my mental health, my happiness, do not allow for any challenge to

my attitudes or my actions, especially when they make me uncomfortable.

Don't judge me. But for all this, guilt in our society is alive and well. It's the feeling that keeps on giving.

I think every one of us here know something of guilt. And it really is the feeling that keeps on giving day and night. In fact, some are so burned with a deep sense of guilt eating away at them that they actually develop serious mental or physiological illnesses.

[7:01] It's a powerful, powerful thing that won't be written out of life simply because our society don't like it. Now, unfortunately, many Christians are moving also to reject the ideal of guilt because increasingly Christians seem to be of the opinion that God's ideal for them is to be happy.

So, again, any challenge to thinking or behavior which makes a Christian uncomfortable is very unwelcome and generally met with a response, again, don't judge me.

Or, in churches, it's more, don't judge me. Essentially, what that means and what that does is when you respond to that, essentially, you're blaming the person who issues the challenge for how you're feeling.

It's their tone of voice, their words, their motivation in challenging you. That's the problem. Don't think for a moment that I need to look inside and see if there's any substantial basis to the challenge.

But, again, at the other extreme, some Christians are so bowed down, and so burdened, so trapped in their sense of guilt that, quite literally, it drives their every waking moment and, indeed, their sleeping moments or their nighttime moments.

[8:32] And it robs them, totally robs them of any sense of enjoyment of their relationship with Christ. Psalm 51 speaks into all of those things and gives us a real-life model of God's pathway for dealing with guilt, God's pathway for turning back to him in guilt, and encourages us to see that the person God esteems is the person who's described, chapter, verse 17, the person who's described as one with a broken and contrite heart or spirit.

First step way, first step in the pathway is to say, if you're a visitor, the outline is on the back of this sheet you handed this morning will help you track through with me a little bit, at least in terms of the major headings.

So, set up my year, my year. First step in the pathway of turning back to God is to say, my rebellion, autonomy, and failure is damning.

But I own all of it in detail. Verse 6 verses. We've already heard the background to the story. It's the awful fall and fall and fall of King David.

And verses 1 and 2 then is an expression of helplessness before God's justice. Have mercy on me, O God.

[10:27] Have mercy on me, O God. According to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

David actually knows that in God's law there is no specific sacrifice to atone for adultery and murder.

There's sacrifices for heaps and heaps of other situations, but there's no specific sacrifice offered to atone for adultery and murder. His only hope is to throw himself on God's mercy.

But it's important as we move into this psalm, this is a really important thing to hang on to, I think.

Even as he knows his guilt and owns it, even as he throws himself in God's mercy, David, in his first two verses, still knows he belongs to God.

God's mercy. Why? Because of God's covenant love. So his guilt is real, but his position of guilt is not despair.

[11:48] Verses 3 through 6, we get a sense of just how powerful this is in David's life. He's lived with it for almost a year before he's confronted by Nathan, the prophet.

He's lived with, verse 3, day and night. He's not been able to hide from himself, even though he's been able to cover his tracks publicly.

And now, he takes ownership. He takes ownership in detail. Now, if you look at the, you don't look at it now, but on the front cover, I've put in a little bit of stuff there.

Very sorry for the small size of the print, but get a magnifying glass and read it at home. But it picks up a very important thing. Our English Bible used three words to describe his crime.

Transgression, iniquity, and sins. Now, for most of us, they're just some sort of vague religious words. But in the original Hebrew, they're very nuanced and very confronting words.

[12:54] Transgressions is much more than doing something wrong. It describes rebellion against God's authority, defiance of God's authority. Iniquity, then, is the opposite of what flows.

It's the self-assertion, the autonomy of making himself his own authority, making himself his own wisdom instead of God. And sins is the most frequently used word and describes the abject failure, which has to be the inevitable consequence of setting our own course in life.

And it's in those, that sense, David owns his sin.

And that moves David from a focus on himself to focus on God. And that's how we see the movement from 2 Samuel 11, the proud, self-absorbed, ruthless, scheming, pleasure-seeker. to the broken man who's absolutely gutted now that he understands how he has treated God in all of this.

[14:20] He understands he has failed many, many people in lots of different ways, but ultimately he comes to see that it's God he has failed.

And so his confession is both detailed and nuanced but ultimately it's not a therapeutic exercise to get things off his chest.

the next verse. It's recognition that his exposure by Nathan the prophet and God's verdict of guilty, guilty, guilty is entirely appropriate.

So his confession is actually bringing him to see the enormity of his crimes before God in a very detailed break it down into its component parts type understanding.

No vague God, I'm sorry for my sin. Now, send me blessings. Isn't that how we often pray? Verse 5 and 6, David makes no attempt to explain away his actions.

[15:46] There's no plea bargaining going on here. David understands that he can't say to God, well actually God, you realize this is a once-off stupidity on my part and I want you to see it in that term.

No. David knows it's not a once-off stupidity. He knows it's not a product of his family, social, cultural or environmental backgrounds.

He knows that what he's done is a fundamental part of him rising up. And it explains, David knows, why in spite of being described by God as a man after God's own heart, he so easily and so radically turned his back on that and set his own course in life and brought himself to disaster.

God's own heart. And he accepts, verse 6, that all of this, and he's now got a great long list of very specific and detailed sins in his mind, he accepts that all of this list is so offensive to God who longs for truth and integrity from the inside out.

Not just an external veneer, God who actually pushes his people to confront the inconvenient truth of their sin.

[17:19] So owning David's sin for David has taken all of that. Now friends, just let me pause there and just sweep us up into some application.

application. This broken spirit that David speaks of in verse 17 is a gift from God. Can I beg you not to fear it?

Because I think that's what we do. Brokenness is God's pathway to renewal and redemption and restoration. Restoration of a sense of joy, of fellowship.

Why would we fear that? Yes, brokenness is inconvenient. Brokenness is darn uncomfortable. Brokenness is a terrible thing to experience.

The process of being broken. But look what it leads to. See, we all long to succeed, don't we?

[18:26] That's a basic part of being human. We want to do well. And not only do we want to do well, but we then want to find personal recognition and validation in doing well, in being a trustworthy, dependable person.

Therefore, I think deep down, we fear failure most of all. And perhaps for many of us, we fear failing our own standards.

And how many times a day do we do that? We set standards for ourselves, we want to validate ourselves by those standards, and then we find we failed our own standards. Or we betray those closest to us, those that we most want recognition of being dependable before.

So we fear owning our sin in all its gory detail.

We really find it hard, I think, to take this first step in repentance and restoration, because we do not like what self-examination reveals about ourselves.

[19 : 45] It's a tautology. And even when we do try and step into this self-examination, we then try and minimize confrontation with the quagmire, which is our hearts.

And we try and do that, I think, through a non-specific, shallow, pain-free, I'm sorry for my sin, as I've already said. And we quickly get through that as a transition to seeking forgiveness and God's blessing.

restoration of the good things that we want from God. My friends, we will never turn to God properly and resolutely until we confront truly and comprehensively and in detail our rebellion, autonomy, and failures.

In and through the good things that God has given us, things which like David became idols, and things to us that become idols to us, or things that, in other words, become more important to us than God himself.

the things we choose to fill our lives with instead of filling our lives with God. Until we confront those things, we will never turn properly to God.

[21 : 32] So my friends, I'd say to you this morning, as I've said to myself over many years now, and again lots this week, stop trying to hide from yourself.

Stop trying to hide from God. Be glad that God pursues you and forces you to confrontation with his word and his offense as the first stage in being free from guilt and moving towards restoration, moving towards a renewal of a sense of enjoyment of God's forgiveness and love.

So the second point then is, your forgiveness and total renewal from the inside out is what I beg for. Picking up verses 7 through to 12. Owning his sin is a start.

But David knows that without God's direct intervention, all the time he owns his sin, his guilt will still stay. And that's because guilt is not just a psychological issue, like many today would want to reduce it to.

So a psychological issue then is fixed by David giving himself permission to be free from guilt. That's what we hear today. Or giving himself permission to love himself again.

[23 : 03] Guilt's not just a social issue either. It's not a simple matter as we try and say in our society. Well let's just lock a person up for 30 years and give him the death penalty.

That's not going to deal with his guilt. Might be a deterrent for society. David's guilt isn't even a religious issue.

Fixed by offering endless sacrifices and prayers. David picks that up in verse 16 and 17. keeping religious festivals. David knows that there's no point of him even trying that pathway because that's not going to address the guilt.

Being more religious doesn't do it my friends. So that's our pathway isn't it? We offset sin here by trying to be more religious here.

It won't work. It doesn't work. It can't work. So David needs God's forgiveness and pleads for God's forgiveness. Described verse 7 as God's heavy duty cleaning operation to remove dirt on the inside, make them clean again.

[24 : 15] Look at verse 7. Purge me with hyssop. Hyssop was always offered with a sin offering because not only you have to deal with the legal guilt, you have to be cleansed from defilement.

Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Put me through the special operation that only you can do, Lord, that heavy duty cleaning cycle that will tumble me around, but in the tumbling around bring the dirt out from the inside.

In verses 8 and 9, David's longing for that response we long for. Most of any time I've had to confess anything to Allison, I confess nervously, but my hope is that I'm going to hear a response that says, thank you for that.

It's all right. The relationship's intact. You're forgiven. That's the thing I crave for as much as I need to confess. And that's what David's craving for in verses 8 and 9.

David wants to hear God saying, it's all right. Everything's forgiven. You're restored. The relationship can move forward as if this had never, ever happened.

[25 : 50] But not satisfied with even that, David wants to push even further. Verses 10, 11, and 12. David isn't happy just to have a reassurance that everything's all right.

He actually wants to be completely renewed. Total renewal from the inside out through God's spirit. Attitudes, desires, and thinking. He's not just after a quadruple bypass for this damaged heart of his.

He wants a complete heart transplant. And he asks for it with some degree of hesitation.

Verse 11 and 12, very hard verses to understand, but here's my take on them. I don't think they need to be as complicated as some commentators make them. But that might just tell you about me, not the commentators. I think he asks for that big heart transplant with some trepidation because he knows jolly well that God would have every right to say, no way, Jose, go to hell. Your crimes against me are so awful that my last words to you are going to be, go to hell, because that's what you deserve. But he hangs on to the reality of existing relationship.

[27 : 18] He hangs on to the reality of God's covenant promise of eternal relationship with David. You have to go back to 2 Samuel chapter 7 verses 12 through to 15 to see the details of that. But God's already committed himself going forward to David.

So he hangs on to that and he longs for this renewal even though in his mind he's battling. Back? Yeah, oh good. So again, pause for some application.

A broken spirit becomes a willing spirit through God's spirit. We can count on it.

We can count on it. This is immensely practical for us as Christians. When we mess up and we do. Our messing up does not break our relationship with God in Christ. But it will rob us of any sense of enjoyment of that relationship.

[28 : 30] It will rob us of a confidence in our salvation. But our hope is this. God's spirit that we now have within us in Christ is committed to renewing us from the inside out so that we wholeheartedly come to the point and grow into the point and overflow into the point of wanting to display the mind of Christ in all things.

don't fear a broken spirit because of what it will lead to.

Third point. My longing, says David, is to be the man after God's own heart who actually brings you glory. Picking up the last verses 13 onwards.

with the renewing of God's spirit in his life, the renewing work of God's spirit in his life, King David anticipates becoming a true model of what it is to be a man after God's own heart as he overflows in praise and thanks.

Look at verse 13. Then, so when I have this renewing work of the spirit, in my life, then I will teach transgressors your way and sinners will return to you.

[30 : 08] The transgressor becomes the teacher. David goes on to say it will be a life of sacrifice. It will be a life of sacrifice, but not the external, religious, outside-in approach of ritual sacrifices, religious sacrifices, sacrifices that are offered on the assumption that God is pleased with my sacrifice and that we are more acceptable to him because of those sacrifices.

David's not interested in that at all. It won't work for me, says David. There is a sacrifice. It's a sacrifice of praise and thanks from a renewed heart, renewed desires, renewed attitudes, overflowing into a new life where genuinely and truly he will be a man after God's own heart because he now has God's spirit at heart.

David has regained the joy of his salvation. Remembering now that the Lord looks for the heart that knows how little it deserves on the one hand and how much it owes on the other hand.

And this is the broken David. He is absolutely confident, verse 17, absolutely confident that God will never despise, make it positive, will always esteem the truly broken, humbled person who returns to him for forgiveness and a total rebuild through his spirit.

But still David's not finished, verse 18 and 19. Let me read these verses and preempt it by saying that commentators generally think these two verses are added on at some later point in time.

[32 : 16] They reckon they don't fit easily with the theme of the sound. But I beg to disagree. I think they fit perfectly. And here's again my take on it. But let me read them to you first. David says, Do good to Zion in your good pleasure.

Build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then you will delight in right sacrifice and burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings. Then bulls will be offered on your altar. again the thought is that these verses speak of national Israel and perhaps were added sometime later in the exile period perhaps.

But I think they fit perfectly here and I think the thought is this. That as David himself turns back to the Lord in repentance and is now focused on the Lord, suddenly his horizons are extended way beyond himself.

To the point that his longing then becomes that God would do for the nation and indeed for the whole world exactly what he's just done in David's life.

Why? Because the nation is equally guilty of adultery before God as David was precisely a guilty of physical adultery.

[33 : 37] And that's where I might disagree with one small point of Don's sermon. David was speaking about me. King David was speaking about me. And you.

Right through the Old Testament God's repeated criticism of his people is you've prostituted yourselves, you've committed adultery, you've gone looking for the pleasure of life that you find and should find in me, you've gone looking for them in other places.

things. And I think David's just saying here, Lord, that very thing I've experienced, please do for the whole nation, for the whole world, in line with your long time salvation promise.

And when the heart of the nation is renewed, then their sacrifices will be delightful to you, Lord. And they will properly reflect appreciation for God's mercy and salvation.

sacrifices were never meant essentially to take away sin in themselves. They were meant to be a picture of God's provision for forgiveness. God would deal with our hearts.

[34 : 47] And not until the nations renewed through your salvation purposes, says David, will we actually see that reality. And then as a nation, we will be a people after God's own heart.

friends, again, application here, this broken spirit will never be despised by God.

We have to beg for it. Beg for it for ourselves, individually. Beg for it for our church. Have we been guilty of spiritual adultery, collectively and individually?

I think so. starting with me. Beg for it for our nation. Don't fear what God uses for our good.

Our proud sinful hearts need to be broken so that we will turn to God. But the same God who breaks us also delights then to rebuild us in his image in Christ.

[36 : 08] Now, even if you're a believer here this morning and you're suffering enormous guilt because you've chosen to walk back into sin, thinking what it offered would be more satisfying than God.

In a sense, I think that will sweep every one of us up here this morning individually, won't it? Some to more of a degree than others. Some with particular specific sins that others don't have to feel guilt over.

But in any situation, if you're a believer in that situation, turn back to God. Own your sin. Don't fear being broken for our sin.

Don't fear being broken by the Lord.

Rather, see it as an opportunity to grow. an opportunity to believe the gospel more and more. That the Lord delights to rebuild broken, humbled people from the inside out as his pathway to being like Jesus and glory.

[37 : 32] The pathway to glory for Jesus will be the pathway to glory for you and me. And again, I say to you this morning, if you're not yet a Christian, if you've not yet addressed your guilt before God, if you're still in the business of trying to ignore your guilt, pretend it's not there, or deal with it in some other way, then go to Jesus.

Because Jesus ultimately is where King David is pointing you to experience God's salvation, forgiveness, and renewal. See, let me put it together like this.

King David needed some serious, heavy-duty intervention. He needed the king of all kings to arrest him and expose him.

He needed Nathan the prophet to speak God's word into King David's heart, illuminating his stupidity and his ignorance.

rebellion. He desperately needed a sacrifice offered on his behalf to deal with his sin, but he knew there was no sacrifice to offer for his particular sin.

[38 : 53] And all of this points us to Jesus. What King David experienced externally, we experience internally.

in the New Testament, Jesus describes himself as God's King. Come to subdue our unruly hearts.

Jesus is God's word who speaks into our lives and illuminates our ignorance and points us to truth. truth. The Holy Spirit within us convicts us of sin and truth and righteousness.

John 16. And Jesus is the priest who is able and has offered the sacrifice perfectly suitable and capable for dealing with the awfulness of our sin before God.

Jesus is the complete salvation package offered to you by the Lord with the promise that the person humbled enough to put out their hand and take what they do not deserve will never ever be despised by God.

[40 : 13] My friend, do not ignore your guilt a moment longer. Do not pretend you don't have a deep-seated sense of guilt before God.

Come to Jesus because I can tell you now, he knows your guilt better than even you know it. and will ever know it. And he has removed it totally from you.
Something you will never ever be able to do for yourself. Let me pray. Lord, these are heavy words in one sense and yet music to our ears in another sense.
for Lord, you never desire to expose your people in all our awfulness without an equal commitment to rebuilding us in all your glory.
Help us not to fear one for the joy of experiencing the other. Amen. Amen.