

Psalm 51

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Preacher: Matt Coburn

[0 : 00] I just want to acknowledge it's hot in here this morning. If you are suffering deeply, there are fans in the front and in the back corners, and if you want to get up and move so you can be in the—I won't be offended.

It's okay. I'd rather you be able to pay attention and hang in there for the next few minutes as we look at God's Word together. So, as we live in this beautiful, un-air-conditioned building to worship God.

He had all the power in the world. No one would speak to restrain him. He saw what he wanted, and he took her, regardless of the cost.

She became pregnant. He did everything that he could to cover his tracks. When he couldn't get his husband, a soldier, back from the lines and have him actually go and sleep with her to cover his transgression, he killed him.

And he took the woman to be his wife. And he wouldn't—and he would have gotten away with it all, this terrible, heinous thing that he had done.

[1 : 30] Which brings us to 2 Samuel 12, 1. You can hear the story here. And the Lord sent Nathan, the prophet, to King David.

He came to him and said to him, There were two men in a certain city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought.

And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him.

Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him. But he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.

Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, As the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die.

[2 : 34] And he shall restore the lamb fourfold because he did this thing, because he had no pity. And Nathan, the prophet, looked at David, the king.

And I'm sure he pointed. He said, You are the man. David was caught, exposed, naked in the spotlight.

Nathan went on to explain to the whole court all that he had done, all that David had done. And David, the king, was sitting there. Maybe you've been there.

Have you ever blown it like that? Have you ever blown it where everyone around you can see it? Have you ever sat there and felt the weight of guilt and shame crush your spirit?

And lie on your shoulders like a lead blanket? Maybe it hasn't been so public.

[3 : 55] Maybe your sin hasn't been so spectacular. Maybe, in fact, the things that you've done were in secret. And nobody knows about them.

But I would guess that all of us, if we have a tender conscience, if we have any sensitivity at all, have had that moment where we realized what a terrible, terrible thing we have done.

When sin reared its head in our lives, showed its power over us, and we were exposed as a sinful man.

At least to yourself in your own conscience, if not to anyone else. So where do you go? Where do you go when the weight of sin, when guilt and shame descends like a crushing weight upon you? We're continuing this morning in our series in the Psalms, and we're going to read Psalm 51 this morning. If you want to turn there, it's page 474 in your pew Bible.

[5 : 13] It is a psalm of penitence. It is a psalm of one who knows their sin and the weight of shame and guilt.

It is a psalm of one who seeks God in the midst of it. It is a psalm of one who runs to God. And this psalm gives language to us to take to God when we find ourselves in that moment.

Exposed and naked as David was. Let's read Psalm 51 together. 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.

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.

[6 : 28] Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth and the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

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 sin and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence.

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. My tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

[7 : 37] 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. Do good to Zion in your good pleasure. Build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings, in whole burnt offerings.

Then bulls will be offered on your altar. Let's pray together. Amen. Holy Spirit, we invite you now, Lord, to bring the truth of this psalm home to our hearts.

Lay bare for us the depths of our sin, and yet point us, Lord, to the hope, to the hope that is possible in you.

God, I pray that you would help us this morning in these few minutes. In Jesus' name we pray.

[8 : 56] Amen. Amen. Amen. In this psalm, what we see is both the crushing weight of guilt for sin on one hand, and on the other hand, joyful freedom of forgiveness that comes from God.

So we're going to explore it in that order. We're going to look at this psalm, and we're going to explore how this psalm exposes and helps us understand the crushing weight of guilt as it falls upon us when we know our sin.

Look with me, verses 3 through 5, together, because there are a few questions that this psalm answers about what sin, when it's truly exposed, how it crushes us.

The first thing is it tells us about the nature of sin. Look with me at verse 3 through 5 again. He writes, David obviously had done terrible things.

He had committed adultery. He had killed a man, and he had sought to cover it all up. But here, what you see is that when David sees his sin, it becomes something that fills the screen of his life.

[10 : 32] My sin is ever before me. I see it all the time. It never goes away. And he recognizes that his sin is not simply horizontal.

The point of verse 4 is not to minimize the heinousness of his sin against Bathsheba or Uriah. Uriah would probably say, wait a minute, you did sin against me too.

Maybe you thought that when you read that verse. And it's true that he did sin against Uriah. And he sinned against Bathsheba. But in fact, all sin, all sin is ultimately against our creator.

All sin is against the one who made us and called us to live for him, in him, to him.

That we might live to his praise and glory. That we might live under his commands and his statutes. And so when we sin against other, the most profound offense of that sin is against our creator to whom we're accountable.

[11 : 40] And David sees that as he is laid bare in his sin. He sees that the greatest sin is against his creator. And against the one, if you know the story of David, against the one who anointed him long ago to be king.

Who preserved him through years and years of suffering and trial and danger. Who sat him on the throne and made a covenant with him. That he would sin on a throne forever, he and his children.

And David knows that that God was the God that he had sinned against and offended so deeply. Verse 5 tells us that it's not just the actions of his sin that he recognizes. But it's the very sin nature within him. The wellspring of his actions was the very reality of his heart. His selfishness, his laziness, his abuse of power. These things welled up from a heart that ultimately was corrupted by sin still. And so, sin teaches... [13:02] So David exposes for us the true nature of sin. And friends, I want to say this morning that this isn't just David and his spectacular sinning that is exposed here.

For in fact, it is every sin, great and small, that is an offense against our creator. That momentary flash of anger. That act of selfishness.

The time when pride rears its head up and we think better of ourselves than of others. The respectable sins of our culture of gluttony and greed.

Or even the sins of omission. The carelessness with which we pursue our discipleship and our desire to live obedient lives before God.

Or even the fickleness of our hearts. How inconstant our love is for our God. Friends, all of these sins stain us.

[14:13] They stain us with the sin like David's. They are offensive to God. And like David, we carry them around.

Perhaps you remember the story of Lady Macbeth from Shakespeare's Macbeth. She plotted with her son to kill the king. But after she accomplished that task, she was driven mad.

Because like David, her sin was ever before her. She would sleepwalk through the palace. Out, out, spot. Damn, spot.

Excuse me, but that's in Shakespeare. Out, out, spot. She washed her hands obsessively because she couldn't get rid of the stain.

She couldn't remove it. And friends, when we are honest, when we are truthful, this is not only David's situation, but this is ours as well.

[15:24] For this is what the second question that David shows us this morning is. This is, the first one is, what is the nature of sin? The second is, what is the result when our sin is exposed?

And it is this stain that can never be removed. It is this constantly before us recognition that we have offended our creator. We have offended the one who made us and gave us life.

And there are real consequences. If you look through this psalm, if you look at what David asked to be restored and what will be brought back to his life, you realize all that he has lost in his sin.

There is no joy in his life because of the awareness of his sin. There is no worship that he is able to bring before God.

The sacrifices that God had ordained are not going to please him because of his sin. In fact, it's more than that.

[16:30] He's alienated from the temple. He's alienated from the worship with the people of God. And in fact, as the king, as the shepherd king who represents the whole nation, verses 18 and 19 suggest that he is aware that the whole nation is bearing the weight of his sin.

And though we are not shepherd kings over our communities, the New Testament points to the same dynamic, that we as a member of a body, when we commit a sin, it affects the whole.

And so there are both individual and communal aspects for our sin. And it is grievous. And it falls upon us like a weight.

It falls upon us like a lead blanket. Maybe some of you have seen the 1986 film, The Mission, starring Robert De Niro.

If you haven't, it's a great film. And I recommend you should see it. It's probably a little violent and adult. So I'll just give you that warning. But some of its themes are very rich.

[17:47] Rodrigo Mendoza is a Spanish slave trader. Rodrigo Mendoza is capturing natives and selling them into slavery.

It's what he does. The only place where there's any humanity in his life is in his love for his brother and for his fiancée. And then one day he finds his brother in bed with his fiancée.

And in rage he kills her. He kills him. And it destroys him. And it undoes him. And he sits in prison in despair because of the terrible thing that he has done.

And a Catholic priest comes to visit him. And Rodrigo pleads for a way out. So the priest takes all of his armor and all of his weaponry and all of the things that he used to commit his sin and he wraps it up in a rope bag and he ties it around Mendoza's waist and he takes him to the Iguazu Falls and he

says, climb it.

And he climbs it again and again and again. And it's a terrible picture of redemption and we'll get there in this sermon. So the movie is not a great picture in that sense.

[19 : 06] But it is a great picture of guilt. It is a great picture of the weight that guilt can bring down upon us.

The third question about this we must ask is, how do we respond when our sin is exposed?

Sometimes we deny it. We pretend it's not there.

We just ignore it. Put a callous in our heart towards that particular thing and try to get on with life.

Sometimes we try to deflect it.

We blame someone else. It's their fault that I did what I did. We excuse it. Well, you don't understand the circumstances, the consequences of not doing it were too great. I had to do it.

Sometimes we minimize it. It's not that bad. It doesn't hurt too many people. We can deny it. We can deflect it.

[20 : 06] Sometimes we are driven by it. We feel like somehow we must make it right. And we spend our whole lives trying to fix that thing that was broken when we sinned.

We try to overcome the consequences of our sin by doing better and doing good and doing more. And sometimes our response is defeat.

And like Rodrigo Mendoza, we walk around with this huge bag of guilt and shame. And it weighs us down.

And it robs our joy. And it destroys our community. And it corrupts our worship. When David was exposed, did you see what happened?

The very beginning of that story. It's such a gracious move and such an important move to see in this psalm. Because you know what? David didn't figure this out on his own.

[21 : 16] And I'm not calling you this morning simply to figure it out on your own. Because did you see? It was God who did it. God sent Nathan to expose his sin.

God will pursue us to show us our sin. He will use the word of God. He will use the community of believers. He will use your circumstances. He will use your conscience.

But God is pursuing you to show you the reality of your sin. So that you don't have to sit there this morning in fear thinking, oh no, is there some sin that I don't know about?

Because God wants to show it to you. God wants to bring you to the same point that he brought David.

As one commentator put it, David was no longer at the point where he was saying, how can I cover my tracks? But God brought him to the point of saying, how could I treat God this way?

[22 : 21] And that's true conviction of sin. That's true understanding. Because you must understand that that weight and that guilt and that shame that you feel, that's right.

Because you've offended God. And you should feel grief over your sin. But God does not leave us there.

That's what the rest of this psalm is about. But if you're here this morning, I want you, I want you to ask God, are you denying your sin?

Are you deflecting your sin? Are you being driven by your sin? Are you living in defeat under your sin? And then, this psalm is an invitation for you to follow in the footsteps of David and to take your sin to God.

Because the rest of this psalm is a picture of David crying out and pleading to God, saying, God, please, you see it in verse 1, be merciful to me, O God.

[23 : 35] He takes his sin to God in great hopes that God can do something for him. And God can. God can give us joyful freedom in the face of our sin because He can forgive our sin.

And that's what I want to look at for the rest of our time this morning. how it is that we can experience the joyful freedom of the forgiveness that we can find in God.

So what does forgiveness look like? Well, we're going to look through this. This is a rich psalm for this. Look at verses 1 and 2. Part of what David says as he's going to God is he's saying, I need you to blot out or to cleanse my sin.

Right? You see it in verse 2. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity. Cleanse me from my sin. Verse 1 at the end. Blot out my transgressions. You know what a blotter does? We don't even use blotters anymore because we don't write in ink.

A blotter was used to try to erase a mistake when you're writing with an ink pen on parchment. And David's saying, I know my sin is like a stain on the parchment.

[24 : 54] Can you blot it out? Can you try to, can you try to cover it over so it doesn't look so bad? David is saying, but don't just blot it.

Don't just try to wipe the surface clean. But wash it. Wash me clean. Wash me so that I am cleansed. David is saying, God, your forgiveness is like the best bottle of shout in the whole world for my soul.

For those of you who've never done laundry, you don't know what I just, shout is stain remover. You spray it on and then you wash it. And what comes out is meant to be a restored garment that has no mark on it.

And David is running to God and he's saying, God, will you do this for me? Will you remove my stain?

Look at verse 7 with me. If you remove my stain, if you wash me, then I will be whiter than snow. It's not just that the stain is removed, but the original purity, that's what that image points to, is the original purity can be restored in my life such that there's no remnant, there's no shadow of that remaining on me.

[26 : 18] Not only is the stain removed, but in another image, the record is erased. Verse 9 is a powerful verse.

David says, hide your face from my sins. And you know what's amazing? This phrase, hide your face, is almost always in the Psalms used by David to say, God, don't hide your face from me.

Don't turn your face away like you can't see me and you can't see me in my situation and you can't see me in my need. And here what he's saying is, hide your face.

Hide your face from my sin like you can't see it, like it's not even there. Like a court record has been completely expunged.

And if you go in the next day and you say, what do you have on me? The folder is empty. Hide your face. This is what forgiveness, according to David, can look like.

[27 : 21] And it's not just these external things of removing the stain or clearing the record, but it's an internal clearing as well. This is what verse 10 points to.

He's not saying simply remove this, but he's saying create in me a clean heart. He's asking for a new creation in him. We're calling back to Genesis, calling on the God who created the world in the first place, saying, God, you can't just wipe this away.

I need to be made new. This wellspring in my heart that leads to such heinous acts, I need to be made new in my inner being. Will you do this, God?

Will you do this through crushing me and then giving me a new heart that is filled instead with joy at my salvation?

Friends, forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness makes us stand before God unashamed. it can bring us to a point where we can stand and feel that there is nothing on us that would cause guilt or shame to well up in our hearts.

[28 : 49] But friends, it's even more than this, isn't it? It's not only that, but if you look at verses 13 through 15, there is a restoration. And the restoration that David talks about is his lips.

His lips are loosed. His lips are loosed to talk about what God has done for him. Verse 13, Then I will teach transgressors your way and sinners will return to you.

I'm able to proclaim what a great God there is who can forgive such horrible things as such, what I have done so that you too can know that you as a sinner can turn to this God and know the forgiveness that I have.

His lips are loosed as he enters into the worship. Then I will praise your name. And his lips are loosed and his heart is loosed again so that he can bring an acceptable sacrifice to God.

Do you see verses 16 and 17? It's saying, If my heart is wrong, if I am still in my sin and unwashed by your forgiveness, I cannot bring a bull and goat to satisfy the offense.

[30 : 09] But when you, God, bring your forgiveness, when you create in me a new heart, when you transform me, then, verses 18 and 19, I can bring a sacrifice again.

And not only I can, but again, this is a corporate thing. We can. The whole nation is restored to a freedom and joy.

See, do you see how even your carrying around the weight of guilt and shame of your sin is not simply your own personal prison that you're carrying around, but it overflows into our corporate

worship.

And God invites you out of that. God invites you to come to him and ask, God, will you give me a broken and a contrite heart?

Will you break my heart with true conviction of my sin? Will you fill my heart with sorrow over it? And then will you make it new by your power so that I can love and worship you.

[31 : 23] So that I can know the joy and the freedom of forgiveness that I have in you. Friends, this is a wonderful song for us.

Because not only does it say that there's a crushing weight of sin and show us that, not only does it say there's a joyful freedom to be had in God's forgiveness, but it points to us again to see how is it that we can have confidence that this is true for us.

On what basis does God, does David go to God and plead for this with confidence? And as David does this, he pulls these threads together from the whole history of redemption.

Let me show you. First, in verse 1. Do you see those two phrases, verse 1 and the second, and the first part of verse 2?

Nope. Just the two phrases in there. In verse 1. According, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy.

[32 : 36] Now, friends, if you were a Hebrew hearing these words, this would resonate in your mind because if you were, if you had read the Scriptures, you would remember this is exactly what Moses heard.

When Moses on Mount Sinai, after Israel had blown it and God had restored his relationship with them, Moses said, God, you have to go with me and because you have to go with me, I need to know who you are, tell me your name, and God comes and he says, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord who is abounding in mercy and full of steadfast love.

These two phrases. And so God is, so David is calling upon the whole experience of the book of Exodus where God called his people to be his own and set his love upon them and made a covenant with them and said, I will love you loyally and faithfully and I will make you my people and I will be your God.

So that's strand one. Strand two is in verse seven. Look with me. Purge me with hyssop and I will be made clean.

This is a picture from the Levitical rites when the priest would come and he would take hyssop, which is a plant, and he would dip it in blood and then he would sprinkle it as a picture of cleansing.

[34 : 12] Picture of cleansing in the temple. The very place where you go to meet with God and yet you know your sin keeps you from meeting with God and God gave the Old Testament sacrificial system where blood was shed by animals and then sprinkled to picture this cleansing that God would do.

So not only the Mosaic Covenant, but the law and the specifics of how forgiveness could happen. Not only that, but if David would have looked ahead, he would have seen what the prophet Isaiah would have said.

in Isaiah 53 when he predicted the servant who would come and restore God's people and God's kingdom. The servant would come.

Isaiah described him like this. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken and smitten by God and afflicted. He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities.

[35 : 35] Upon him was a chastisement that brought us peace. And with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way.

And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. which points ahead to the passage that we read earlier from 1 John.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Why? Verse 2-2.

Because he has provided for us, Jesus Christ, the propitiation for our sins. How is it that God can forgive our sins? Because he loved us so much that he would not let us be crushed by our guilt and our sin forever.

But he sent his son because he loved us so much. And his son came and he bore our griefs and our sorrows. He was crushed and broken for us and for our sins so that we might not stay crushed and broken but so that we might instead receive pardon and forgiveness and freedom and joy that we might be brought back to be God's people when we don't deserve it, when we have blown it.

[37 : 01] Friends, this is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When we, in our sin, feel like we have blown it, when we feel naked and exposed, when we are carrying around that bag of guilt and shame that weighs us down at every turn, we have a greater confidence than David because we can look to the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ and know that God has accomplished forgiveness for us, that God has done what we could not do to take away our sin and he has wiped it clean and he has washed us white as snow and he looks at us and he says, you are clothed in the righteousness of God, the righteousness particularly of Jesus Christ and he delights in us and in that delight then we have joy and freedom and we have a song to sing about what a great Savior we have.

We have a message to tell to the world that God can forgive us and remove our guilt and our shame and our sin and we can come here and worship together and tell of a God of a God who does not leave us under the crushing weight but instead who brings us to the point of being crushed by our sin in conviction so that when we see our sin as it truly is we truly know the joy of freedom that we find in forgiveness.

Let's pray. God, I pray this morning for us as your Holy Spirit searches our hearts.

Lord, I am sure there are some this morning who are burdened and weighed down by their sin who live in isolation and alienation because their guilt is so great and they feel there is no remedy.

God, I pray this morning for them. You would be merciful to them. Will you come, Lord, and give joy to their crushed hearts? Will you give them a new heart?

[39 : 23] Will you loosen their lips to praise your name? Lord, I pray for many this morning who may recognize that they're minimizing, deflecting, denying their sin.

God, I pray that you would bring, Lord, real conviction that we would feel the crushing weight of the offense of our sin against you so that we might also know the joy of forgiveness that we have in you.

God, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.