

Singing when guilt gets a grip.

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[0 : 00] We're here in the middle of the series on Psalms. It's a, as Fiona says, it's been a really great series, and I'm going to have a look today at Psalm 51. Singing when guilt gets a grip.

Next slide, please. So Psalm 51, just a bit of background, and I'll do a bit more background once I've read the psalm, but it's a tremendous psalm with lots of fridge magnet verses in it.

So if you go into your local Bible book, Christian bookshop or online, you'll find lots of these verses on fridge magnets. So it's a great psalm.

Written after the prophet Nathan came to see David after he'd committed adultery with Bathsheba, which was a hugely unseemly episode recorded in 2 Samuel.

And I'm just going to very briefly go over that. I'm not, this is unseemly, but it's important in terms of context. So David, this is falling off me.

[1 : 06] David went out and stood on the balcony or on the roof of his palace and saw a young woman bathing in the river, and he lusted after her, and he called her to him.

Now this young woman was married to a man called Uriah, Uriah the Hittite, a bit like Jones the Steam. But he called her to himself, to David, and slept with her and she became pregnant.

And then when David knew that she was pregnant, Bathsheba sent a message to him saying, I'm pregnant, David did something which was really, really devious.

The first thing he did was call Uriah back to him. He was at war, but he called him back to the palace on the assumption that once he'd done his jobs in the palace and spoken to the people he needed to, he'd go home.

And he would sleep with his wife, and then David could get away with it. He would pretend, or rather everybody would assume, that the baby was Uriah's, and he would get away with it.

[2 : 20] But Uriah didn't. Even when David got him drunk, he still stayed in the palace and slept in the palace forecourt. So David had a problem.

David had a problem. And so what he did was that he essentially killed Uriah. Not himself, but he sent word that Uriah should be put on the front line of the front line in the most dangerous part of the battle.

And of course, Uriah was killed, and then David thought, well, jolly good, all sorted.

After a period of mourning, David took Bathsheba as his wife, and she gave birth to a son. 1

Samuel chapter 11 records, but the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

One of those wonderful times in Scripture where it's slightly understated. The thing that David had done displeased the Lord. Well, it would do, wouldn't it? And God sent David, God sent Nathan the prophet to challenge David.

[3 : 31] Now, Nathan the prophet, the same Nathan the prophet that anointed Solomon king in that very, very good song, orchestral piece that you might know. So, I try.

And God says this to David, I anointed you king over Israel, I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I would have given you much more. Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord to do evil in his sight?

You've killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and you've taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. God says to David, I gave you all of this, and if you wanted more, you could have asked.

And yet David wasn't satisfied. David wasn't satisfied with what he had, and he went after the thing that he couldn't have, despite God giving him so much.

[4 : 42] And then David, another slightly understated phrase or comment, David said to David, I have sinned against the Lord. Good spot. Well done. And then the sad thing is that the baby that

Bathsheba had died, it was part of the consequence of David's sin, although David fasted and prayed and lay on the floor, face down, for a number of days.

The baby died. Terrible, terrible consequence of his sin. But then in due course, David and Bathsheba had a further child, Solomon, and we know all about him.

Okay, let's hear the psalm, shall we? Sorry, just go back a moment, Josh, I beg your pardon. This is the unseemly episode, but just look there.

David is described as a man after God's own heart. And there is something, not of a contradiction, but of something to wrestle with there, isn't there?

David did something which was terrible and cruel and sinful, and he knew it was. And yet David is described as a man after God's own heart.

[6 : 02] Let's look at the psalm together. 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. My sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.

So you're right in your verdict and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb.

You taught me wisdom in that secret place. Cleanse me with hyssop that 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.

[7 : 11] 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 so that sinners will turn back to you. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God, my Saviour, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice or to bring it. You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart you, O God, will not despise.

May it please you to prosper Zion, to build up the walls of Jerusalem.

Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous. In burnt offerings, offered whole, then bulls will be offered on your altar. Goodness me, there's a man who is writing in anguish.

[8 : 21] He's writing because he knows, because Nathan the prophet came to him and said, you have sinned. You have done wrong. And he used a lovely illustration of a king having lots of sheep and then a poor man having one sheep who had become part of the family, essentially.

And then the king had visitors, and instead of taking one of his own sheep to feed the visitor, he took the poor man's one sheep.

And King David said, whoa, that's terrible. You shouldn't have done that. And then Nathan said, that man is you. Now be mindful of what Nathan did there.

It was pretty brave because kings in those days had the habit of taking people's heads off. And he was quite able, he would have been entirely evil to say, I don't like what you're saying, go and take his head off and job's a good one.

I'll carry on. But God convicted him. God convicted him of his sin and he wrote this psalm of anguish which there are a whole pile of really interesting bits to.

[9 : 41] So I would encourage you this week, if I don't cover the bit that you want me to cover, to go back and have a look at Psalm 51. It's a really interesting piece.

Let's talk first about the imperative of confession. We are going to be sin, we are going to sin, we are sinful people. This side of heaven will get things wrong.

I will sin, you will sin in thought, word and deed in the things we have done and the things we have left undone just to continue John's Anglican liturgy for this morning.

Sin is part, sadly, of who we are because of the fall. So this isn't about, I think I'll stop sinning and of course that's the ambition but when I sin I need to be really clear with myself but more importantly with God.

David made no bones about the fact that he sinned. He made no bones about the fact that he'd done something which was terrible in the sight of God.

[10:57] Have mercy on me. God, have mercy on me. Cleanse me. Wash me. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart.

you God will not despise. You might hear sometimes or I have heard sometimes people talk about doing carpet time with God when the only thing you can do is fall on your knees and say to God I've sinned.

I've got it wrong. And what I've done is despicable. By the way, you're not despicable but your actions might be.

And just note the language of David. The language of being soiled, being sullied and we need cleaning. This is about by sinning we have dirtied ourselves.

We've jumped in a muck heap and we're dirty and we're smelly and we're not presentable and we need washing.

[12:20] We need cleansing. We need healing. And part of our Christian walk part of our life with Jesus is to get confession right.

Now confession isn't self-flagellation for days on end by the way. But confession is straightforward honest.

I'm sorry I got it wrong. No equivocation. No well you might think that that was maybe possibly wrong but you know there were circumstances in any way he did it first.

No. No. I was wrong. I was wrong to do that. I was wrong to think like that. I was wrong to speak like that.

I was wrong not to do that. I was wrong and I'm sorry. I was wrong I was wrong to do that. I was wrong to do that. I was wrong and we'll come on to what happens then in a moment.

[13:28] You see there's a cost when we sin. God is a just God. He doesn't punish us unfairly but there are consequences for our behaviour.

The worst consequence and the immediate consequence is it separates us from God. We almost put a net up or a door closed between us and God.

He didn't put it up. We put it up. And we need to find our way back to God. We need to say to God yeah I'm sorry and I accept and I understand that there may be consequences here for I know my transgressions my sin is always before me against you only you have I sinned and have done evil in your sight.

So you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. I mean David's stating the obvious there isn't he? But it's also important for us to remember why is this happening?

Well maybe it's because you did a daft thing. In my career I've spent a lot of time with people who found themselves in custody and they would sit and I'd go and visit them and they'd sit and they'd say it's not fair that I'm here.

[14:55] And it's really hard to say anything other than it's entirely fair that you're here. What you did wasn't okay and there's a consequence. I think what you're saying is I don't like it in here.

Well probably that's a good thing. I don't want to get too far into penal policy of course. But there are consequences and for David there was a terrible consequence.

his son died. Dreadful. As I was preparing for this and reading it and thinking goodness me how do you cope with that?

I've sinned and my son has died. Dreadful. forgiveness. Now don't forget forgiveness is always freely available.

But sometimes we need to pay for the consequence of our sinful behaviour. There are consequences of our behaviour.

[16:05] forgiveness. And of course forgiveness is there. But just because we've been forgiven just because we've been made right with God doesn't mean that necessarily we don't have to have a punishment.

A good father punishes his children. The mercy of God. So we talk about punishment and then we talk about mercy.

According to your unfailing love according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.

Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

So David here is moving away from confession to a plea to a crying out to God for his mercy.

And he doesn't he just says to God but God you have unfailing love. You're a loving God. You're a merciful God.

[17 : 19] You are a kind God. You love me. And I know you've forgiven me. Your unfailing love never goes from me.

According to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Some of us here will remember blotting paper and fountain pens.

Yeah? I have a fountain pen at home and I really like my fountain pen but it didn't have to take a long time to learn how to use a fountain pen when I was about 11. And I used to go home every day with blue fingers and a right mess and blotting paper used to soak up the excess ink.

It was a weird system wasn't it? Anyway there we are. But it isn't about drying up the mess. It's about getting rid of the mess. Blot it out.

Get rid of it. It doesn't exist anymore. Move it away from my line of vision. Turn the page. Or whatever image you want.

[18 : 33] Of God saying that's it. Gone. It's finished. Hide your face from my sins. Blot out my energy.

Don't cast me from your presence. Or take the Holy Spirit from me. That's a wonderful cry and one that we need to echo. Don't go away God.

Don't throw me out. Please don't throw me out. God will never throw you out. Don't take the Holy Spirit from me. We talked a lot about the Holy Spirit yesterday on the Holy Spirit today at the Alpha course.

It was tremendous. tremendous. It's tremendous. But the Spirit that lives within me, the Spirit lives within you, oh God don't take him out.

Don't take your Holy Spirit from me. I need him to guide me, to correct me, to put me on the right path.

[19 : 38] And then God says, oh sorry, David recognises that only God can change us. David knew that he needed God to help him change.

And I think that this is something that we really, really need to both learn and internalise. So if I sin, or rather when I sin, and I ask for forgiveness, and I can feel forgiveness, and I feel refreshed and renewed, and then I think smashing, I can crack on now.

And that's an error. We need God to be with us in the change process, in the moving away from where we were to who we are.

Change from glory into glory. glory. That idea that we incrementally become more like Jesus, till in heaven I take my place.

It ain't finished until we get to heaven. But incremental improvement. We need God for that. David recognised that. Let me hear joy and gladness.

[20 : 57] Create a pure heart in me. Create a pure heart in me. Renew me in me a steadfast spirit.

Steadfast spirit, that behaviour, that part of our being, that spirit within us that says, I'm not going to go and do that again.

and I'm determined not to. Now the difficulty is that sometimes we do anyway and we have to go back round this cycle of please forgive me, I have displeased you.

But give me a steadfast spirit. Give me a spirit which accepts my need for God every day. And creates those habits that we've talked about quite a lot.

over the last couple of years. Creating those habits of prayer, of scripture reading, of meeting together, of singing and worshipping, of moving away from the things that we don't want to have in our lives.

[22 : 07] That's all part of creating and renewing and God helping renew a steadfast spirit within us. Restore to me the joy of your salvation. salvation. That's a really good fridge magnet verse by the way.

But it's also true. We sometimes, and I worry about this in the West, we sometimes forget that being a Christian is a joyous thing.

It's a serious thing, it's a grave thing, but it's also a joyous thing. And we're allowed to have fun.

We're allowed to enjoy knowing that God loves me, loves you.

And there's a need for us to remember that when Jesus said I've come to give you life and life in all fullness, that means that as Christians we should have a better time, more fun, more full life than those who don't know Jesus.

Because they're missing out. open my lips and my mouth shall declare your praise. Open my lips and I can't help but praise you.

[23 : 25] I can't help but be the person of worship and praise. All of these things we need to work at, all of these things we need to be mindful of, all of these things we need to think, well, actually there's something here which I'm not quite getting right.

God help me get it right. Make me a different sort of person. You see, the difficulty with this psalm, apart from the fact that there's lots in it and some of the topics are quite complicated, is that there's a temptation to think, as with some other parts of scripture.

Well, if God just forgives me, if David can go and sleep with another man's wife, make her pregnant, and then when he doesn't like the outcome, kill her husband, and then God says, yeah, it's all right, and, you know, he's a man after God's own heart, well, I might as well crack on sinning, and just say sorry sometimes.

And Paul had something very important to say about that in Romans chapter 6. Shall I go on sinning so that grace might increase?

No, never. I think probably Paul in the original, it isn't in the original Greek, but in the original said, don't be too soft.

[25 : 09] What do you mean? You're completely misunderstanding this. You don't go on sinning so you get more forgiveness. It's a daft way of thinking about it.

But it's a way that we can be seduced into. It doesn't matter because you can be forgiven for that. We have to work hard.

We have to work hard at the repentance stuff. We have to work hard at the crying out to God for his gift of mercy. And then we have to work hard with God and with God's help to change.

We have to be people who are changing, who are different every Sunday morning. I pray that we'll go out different from how we come in.

We know a little bit more about God. We know a little bit more about ourselves. We know a little bit more about each other. Am I different? Am I changing? hope of forgiveness and renewal.

[26 : 30] 1 John 1, 8 and 9, one of the wonderful passages in Scripture, if we claim we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. And the truth is not in us. If we're saying we're good, we're a good person, you're deceiving yourself.

And you're lying for yourself. If we confess our sins, he's faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

There's that cleansing word again, that cleaning word again, that being renewed and freshened. This is an absolute promise and it's a wonderful promise.

I do love these verses because there's no equivocation about it. If we say we have no sin, we sort of are kidding ourselves a bit and maybe the truth might not be fully in us.

If we confess our sin, God will have a think about it. But we say that. We confess our sin. God is faithful and just. Will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[27 : 48] Absolute promise. Not only God will forgive us, but he'll stand us up and set us off on the journey again with him.

That notion of watching a small child learn to walk and they toddle a couple of steps and sit down and then they stand up and do another couple of steps and sit down and then they suddenly start walking.

When we sin, God picks us up, he sets us right and he sends us on the road again. The journey with him, with all its complications, with all its confusions, with all its fears and temptations, but he's with us.

And when we fall again, he'll lift us up again. And that's the deal. And so, when we sinned, we need to be really honest about that with God.

And I'm repeating myself here deliberately. There is a cultural norm in our country and our society of minimizing our own sin and maximizing other people's sin.

[29 : 19] I've told you this before. I was talking to a man who had killed somebody. He was in prison. I don't do that normally just in the cafe. And he said, you think I'm evil, don't you?

And I hadn't got in my head that we were having a theological conversation. And also, when you've got something opposite someone who's killed somebody, you're careful with your words. He said, yeah, you do.

He said, but look over there, that man there, he's killed three people. As if that makes him okay. That desperate need for somebody else is worse than me.

When we sin, call it sin. Say to God, I know I have displeased you. I know that this is not where you want me to be, who you want me to be, and I'm sorry.

And don't try and blame somebody else for it. Just live in that moment of repentance. And then say to God, create in me a pure heart, oh God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

[30 : 37] Don't leave me in this well of despair because I have sinned. Renew me, cleanse me, refresh me, let me be the person that you want me to be.

Recognize that there may be a consequence to our sin. There may be consequence to ourselves, but really also be aware there may be a consequence to those that we love.

I might need to rescue a relationship with my family, or my friends, or my colleagues.

there may be a consequence to our sin. We need to ask God to change us.

And then wonderfully, and because we worship a God of hope, we're going to crack on. Get on with what God is asking you to do.

[31 : 54] be the person that God wants you to be. Live in the strength of God's Holy Spirit living within you, knowing that he will equip you for all good things.

Because David didn't see the end of his ministry with this dreadful, unseemly, unsavory, murderous, episode in his life.

He suffered a consequence. He had to do serious repentance. But then God stood him up again.

And said, David, there's still stuff for you to do.

Remarkable. Remarkable. But we worship and are loved by a remarkable God. whoever you are, whatever you've done, wherever you feel today, when we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all our righteousness.

God has a job for you to do tomorrow. we just need to get in the place of spotlessness, not because we're spotless, but because he's made us spotless, so we can crack on with the job that God has for us tomorrow.

[33 : 33] Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's Let's pray.