

Psalm 51 Repentance (part 1 – 2nd version preached 1-7)

Today, I would like to preach a sermon on the doctrine of repentance. It will not be something new to us, but instead a reminder of that which is ESSENTIAL for the Christian. Do you remember the first words of Jesus' earthly ministry? "***Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand***" (Matt. 3:2; Mark 1:1). There is no such thing as a Christian who is not repentant. Repentance and faith go together. Psalm 51 is one of the best places in the Bible to learn about repentance. It was written by David as a prayer to God, a prayer of repentance. In this Psalm we see at least 7 truths about repentance (3 today, 4 next week).

1. Repentance is possible. Many people have a hard time forgiving themselves. When they consider their sins, they wonder, "*How can God forgive my sins?*" But, we can say with assurance: repentance is possible with God. The context of this Psalm is King and his repentance. Let me retell the story. Israel's armies were away in battle. But, not David. He was at home. And he saw a beautiful woman bathing on her rooftop. And he was tempted as he gave in to his lustful desires, which turned into the sins that would follow. It began with adultery. And, after discovering she was pregnant, he called her husband, home from the battle for some rest and relaxation with his wife. But Uriah refused to go into his house, knowing his comrades were on the battlefield. After trying twice David realized this wasn't going to work. So, he wrote a sealed letter to his commander calling for Uriah to be sent to the front lines (delivered by Uriah himself), where David knew he would surely meet his death (which he did).

Now, David was the King, God's representative to govern and lead and protect his people with all godliness and wisdom. And NOW, he committed the worst of sins. And this murder wasn't just any old soldier. Uriah was his friend! Though a foreigner, he was counted as one of David's mighty men, in his inner circle, whom he could trust with his life. I'll bet he was there as David was running from Saul, when he had nothing. That was his friend, and a great man of integrity! At the end of the day, we see adultery, coveting, lying, stealing another man's wife, and murder. Oh, how David must have felt as he tried to hide his sins. Looking back on this time David says in Psalm 32:3: "**For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.**" But eventually Nathan the Prophet confronted him and this prayer in Psalm 51 is what follows.

David may have thought, "*After everything I have done, can I be forgiven?*" And then, by the grace of God, he remembers the mercy and steadfast love of God. He considered the character of God, and he knew that forgiveness was possible. Look at v. 1. He says: "**Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgression.**" In this verse David appealed to the character of God. I am sure he remembered Moses as he went up on the mountain to receive the Law of God. It was there that God revealed his name to Moses. We read in Exod. 34:4-7: "**So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone. ⁵ The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. ⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin . . ."**

David appealed to the name of God. And he knew forgiveness was possible for him. This is who God is! I know of NO cases where REAL repentance takes place and God does not forgive! Heb. 11:6 says: **“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”** Today, there is a God who forgives sins! And he forgives because that is his character. Mercy and grace and steadfast love and faithfulness is his name. It is who He is! I (We) would not be here today if God did not grant repentance and forgive our sins. Today, repentance is a reality because of the character of God! God will forgive!

2. Repentance involves confession of sin. Sin is the occasion for repentance. Repentance is necessary because of SIN. In this prayer of confession David recognizes his sin before God. Notice how many different words for sin we see in this Psalm. Verse 1: **“blot out my transgressions.”** Verse 2: **“Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”** Verse 3: **“For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.”** Verse 4: **“Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.”** Verse 5: **“Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”** Verse 9: **“Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.”** David knows he is a sinner!

Now, I think that most people in the world know they are sinners. If they are really honest, their hearts testify to this fact. But, they may not call it sin. They may call it a mistake or an error or a fault or a blunder, or just something that is wrong in their family or culture. Everybody knows it is wrong to be unfaithful in your marriage, to murder, to steal from someone else, to disobey parents, etc. Prisons all over the world are full of people that do such things. And if you want to be clear about what sin is and what it means to confess your sins, Psalm 51 is a good place to begin. We see 3 truths about the person who truly confesses his/her sins. So, what does confession look like?

i. Sin nature. If you want to confess your sins you must realize you ARE a sinner by nature. Look at v. 5: **“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”** In David’s prayer of confession, he knew he was a sinner by nature. He was born with a sin nature. He was saying, *“God, I am a sinner to my core. It is who I am. I was born with this nature.”* This is called the doctrine of original sin. As a cat is born a cat and a dog is born a dog and an elephant it born an elephant, we are born as sinners; from Adam and Eve to their kids to their kids, etc.

Listen to our confession: *“Of the Fall of Man We believe that man was created in holiness, under the law of his Maker (13); but by voluntary transgression fell from that holy and happy state; in consequence of which all mankind are now sinners, not by constraint, but choice; being by nature utterly void of that holiness required by the law of God, positively inclined to evil; and therefore under just condemnation to eternal ruin, without defense or excuse.”*

Job 15:14: **“What is man, that he should be pure, Or he who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?”** Job 14:4: **“Who can make the clean out of the unclean? No one!”** Rom 5:12: **“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through**

sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.” We are not merely “good” people gone bad; we are sinners by nature.

ii. Specific sins. Confession involves specific sins. Look at v. 3. David says, “**For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.**” Look at v. 14. He says, “**Deliver me from bloodguiltiness . . .**” David KNEW his specific sins. And in v. 14 I believe he is thinking of the murder of Uriah. He was thinking of his adultery. He was thinking of his lies. He was thinking of his betrayal of a faithful friend. He knew he murdered Uriah. He was thinking of his integrity as the “king” of God’s people (etc). In the same way, when we confess, we must be specific. Lord, forgive me for being lazy in neglecting family worship. Lord, forgive me for not loving my wife as Christ loved the church, for putting myself and my desires before hers. Lord, forgive me for not being submissive to my husband in my heart. Lord, forgive me for not obeying my parents the first time they asked me to clean my room or do my homework. Lord, forgive me for the evil thought against my brother. Forgive me for looking at those videos on the internet. Forgive me for . . . The list goes on and on. There are sins of commission (what we do) and sins of omission (what we do not do). There are also secret sins of the heart that we do not even know we have. As a Christian, I am glad that Christ has covered ALL my sins. But, I still must confess. And, the Bible says, “*Confess your sins one to another*” (James 5:16). In this way, we must also be specific.

iii. Sin against God. Another aspect of confession is this: Ultimately, our sins are against God. Look at v. 4. David says, “**Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight . . .**” David KNEW that he had sinned against God. And by saying, “*Only against you*” he is focused on the heart of true confession and true repentance. True confession knows that sin is essentially, ultimately, against God. To sin is to miss the mark of God’s holiness. To sin is to break any of God’s commands (in our hearts and in our actions). To sin is to break God’s covenant. God requires holiness in order to dwell in his presence, in order to have a relationship with Him. In v. 9, David says, “**Hide your face from my sins . . .**” Verse 11: “**Cast me not away from your PRESENCE . . .**” Verse 12: “**Restore to me the joy of your salvation . . .**”

Confession isn’t just good for the soul. It is necessary for true repentance to take place. And in this kind of confession, I believe there must be a desire NOT to continue doing the things you are confessing. There is a turning from sin and a turning to righteousness. To confess is to know we are sinners and have fallen short of the glory of God. To confess is to be specific. To confess is to ultimately know that our sins are against God. To confess properly is to say, “*I don’t want to do those things. I don’t want to think in such ways. I don’t want to do ANYTHING that would come between me and my creator!*” Listen to our confession: In repentance we are “*deeply convinced of our guilt, danger, and helplessness, and of the way of salvation by Christ, we turn to God with unfeigned contrition, confession, and supplication for mercy.*”

3. Repentance is a matter of the heart. Look at v. 6. David says, “**Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.**” And then in v. 10: “**Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit *within me*.**” And then in vv. 16-17: “**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.**”

Did you know that Jesus' greatest charge against the religious leaders of his day centered around an unrepentant heart? There is a story from Matt. 15 where the religious leaders came to Jesus and ask "***Why his disciples didn't follow all the traditions of the elders?***" (These were not the commands of God. These were traditions added later.) In v. 7 he says, "**You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ⁸ This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; ⁹ in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. ¹⁰ And he called the people to him and said to them, Hear and understand: ¹¹ it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.**" And then in v. 15 Peter says to him, "**Explain the parable to us. ¹⁶ And he said, Are you also still without understanding? ¹⁷ Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? ¹⁸ But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone**" (Matt. 15:7-20). In the same way, true repentance is a matter of the heart! Please hear me! Please listen to these words!

I hope this is something you have noticed through the years about my preaching and in my own life. What you see is what you get. You might say, "*What do you mean by that?*" I never want to put something on in front of you (or anyone). I know that out of the abundance of my heart follows what I say and what I do. When my heart is in error, you will see it. When my heart reflects my desires to follow Christ and do what is right, you will see it. Brothers and sisters, God is concerned with our hearts. And our repentance must flow from a heart that yearns for God in the Gospel of Christ, that wants forgiveness, that pursues doing what is right the next time.

This is really the difference between a true and a false professor of the Gospel. Prov. 21:27: "**The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, How much more when he brings it with evil intent!**" "**Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the of my Father who is in heaven**" (Matt. 7:21). Probably the scariest words in all the Scriptures are these from the mouth of Jesus on the last day to a people who thought they were doing what was right. They prophesied. They cast out demons. They did mighty works. But, their hearts were far from him. And he will say: "***I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness***" (Matt. 7:23). True Repentance comes from the heart! And if you look at your heart, and the way you live your life does not reflect a humble repentant heart, ask God to help you. Turn from the evil desires of your heart and look to Christ (gospel).

Repentance is possible. Repentance involves confession of sin. Repentance is a matter of the heart. And today as we take the Lord's Supper, we come with HEARTS of repentance. And we do this by faith, as know we have a savior who has given Himself as a sacrifice in our place.