

STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF DAVID

Taught in Ambassador's Class of Peninsula Bible Church, Palo Alto, California
April 1979 through December 1979

by
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II Psalm 51:1-9 November 11, 1979

David's Repentance Part I

Today we are beginning a look at Psalm 51. Last week we left our hero having been confronted about his sins by God through Nathan the prophet. He fully confessed them saying, "I have sinned against the Lord." [II Samuel 12:13] Then Nathan said to him, "The Lord also has taken away your sin; you shall not die. However, because this deed has given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child that is born to you shall surely die." Then the Lord strikes the child with illness and David begins his prayer of repentance, of seeking the grace of God. It is probably right here, hopefully to convince the Lord the child should not die, that our lesson today fits.

There are really four or five pleas in this Psalm. Verses 1 through 4 are a plea for forgiveness. David has just been confronted by his sin. As you recall, he has been hiding it for over a year. During that time he has been wrung dry because of that and because of his guilt. His life has been pretty miserable even though he has kept up a facade and kept up the leadership of the country, condemning men to death for the same crimes he committed. He has also led the worship of Yahweh knowing all the while there is unconfessed sin in his life. During this time God just quietly squeezed him, so when it came time for God to put the finger on him, he was a broken man. So his first plea, of course, is for forgiveness.

As you know, Hebrew poetry is repetitive. It contains parallelism. One line says something and the next line may repeat the same idea with a different nuance or expand on the idea of maybe even give a contrast to the idea. So you will see parallelism here throughout. Each verse has two lines.

Psalm 51:1:

For the choir director. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. For I know [am conscious of] my transgressions, [literally: my rebelling, willful sin] And my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, And done what is evil in Thy sight, So that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, And blameless when Thou dost judge.

His plea for forgiveness starts out "Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my transgressions." Why doesn't he plead for God's justice? [*Loud laughter from the class*] Right! He is a dead man, and he knows it. He has violated the 6th, 7th and 10th commandments along with some others plus a little hypocrisy, and he is dead. Apart from the grace of God he is through. He has had it. Even though he is the king, there is no provision in the ten commandments for kings to sin and order other people to be killed. So David knows that apart from the grace, the mercy, the lovingkindness of God, [which has the idea of pity] compassion of God, [which has the idea of sympathy] he isn't going to make it. So he first appeals to God's character. He knows his God is a God of lovingkindness, a God of compassion. He is

not a God like the pagan gods around him. His God really loves his creatures. He in going to incarnate himself in a human body, soul and spirit and will be an experiential God. David senses way back then that the God he has is a God who really understands human beings. So David appeals to the compassion, the mercy of this God. He knows, as far as he is concerned, he doesn't have a leg to stand on.

Interestingly enough he acknowledges these are transgressions. They are not just sins. They are not things that happened in ignorance. These are willful. The word could be translated "rebellious." He is a deliberate rebel against the known will of God, and he knows it. So he wants his rebellion blotted out. The Mosaic law has no sacrifice for sins of willfulness, or sins of the high hand [lifting your hand against Jehovah.] There is no covering for those sins, so he doesn't ask for that. He asks that God might "blot them out." God always goes first class. So David sees way back in those days that if his heart is really going to be free from guilt and cleansed from rebellion, God has to do a complete blotting out job. With an unclean heart he cannot go through the rituals that speak symbolically of a cleansed heart.

Notice David says he wants to blot it out thoroughly. Why thoroughly? "Wash me thoroughly from my Iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." What has David learned about sin that makes him want to be totally clean with not one little speck left? How did David start out to become an adulterer, a murderer, a liar and a hypocrite? Class: One look. Bob: Right. Just one little dinky bit of lust! That's all. That was all it took to start the whole snowball down into the pit. He realizes now, "I don't want just a washing job, I want a thorough washing and cleansing on every spot on me. I can't trust me."

Then he also realizes that this blotting out has to be done by a "washing and a cleansing." He is dirty. He feels guilty. He has felt guilt for some time. It is getting dirtier and dirtier, and the dirtier he feels, the more estranged and alienated he feels from a God who is Holy. The primary attribute of God, as revealed in the Scriptures, is not love. It is not grace. It is not mercy. It is holiness. The word of God to mankind is, "Be ye holy for I am holy." Now it does not say God is lopsided. It does say, however, that the fact that God is a holy God is over and above all others the issue in dealing with mankind. God cannot deal with us on any other basis than his holiness. He does not wink at sin. He cannot wink at sin. He says, "I cannot deny myself." He is not like the pagan gods who do anything. Our God is constrained by his character. And the chief attribute of his character as he reveals it is holiness. So everything that God does must be done in the context of his holiness. If he is to have mercy, lovingkindness, compassion and grace toward David, he must first deal with his holiness. So David realizes there has to be a washing and a cleansing of him by God or he is a dead man.

Comment from class: I have thought very often on the theory of God and the only way I can even approach getting a handle on it is through my own transgressions or what's wrong in my life. How do you approach it?

Bob's response: Same feeling. There is no way I can describe God except as God describes himself. He "...dwells in unapproachable light whom no man has seen or can see." That is describing Jesus Christ in context of I Timothy 6:16. I think of light as being bright; it is clean; it exposes; it reveals. There are no shadows in it. That's how I think of God's holiness. It is an infinite light, everything wide open, nothing concealed, totally penetrating every nook and cranny of my being and laying it out for what it is. There is no hiding. I can't turn down the light. I kind of think of it in that way.

To try and put the purity and holiness of God in human terms is a bit difficult. But he does describe his Son as dwelling in light that is unapproachable who no man has seen or can see. As flawed and fallen creatures, there is no way we can be in that kind of a presence. It would destroy us! In the day of laser beams it makes more sense to us. We better understand how light can destroy now. So that is kind of how I picture God's purity and holiness. God has no flaws in his character, so he wants himself totally revealed.

The whole of the Bible is the revelation of God. God's very name of Yahweh means I AM THAT I AM and also the composition that I WILL BE THAT I SHALL BE or WILL BE. That little verb has the idea "I am the God who eternally exists, who is increasingly coming to be in the sense of increasingly revealing myself." That is the covenant name of God, Yahweh. He is a God who has no flaws, no dark places. He wants to be totally exposed to

mankind that we might see what God really wants for man. So God is willing to expose himself totally and utterly up to becoming incarnate and going through the same birth and growing process that man does, all the while displaying his purity and his holiness in impure circumstances amongst impure people. So God wants us to know him totally as far as the finite mind is able to. God knows us totally as far as an infinite mind does. That is why Hebrews 4:15-16 says we are to come "boldly [or literally with free speech] to the throne of grace" when we sin "that we might receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need." because we have a high priest "...who has been tempted in all things as *we are yet* without sin." We have an experiential God who can literally understand us. He has been revealing himself, and he wants us to reveal ourselves. That is why the Christian life is a life of transparency. We ought to be a transparent people.

That is why we try to encourage things like body life, but it is difficult. We tend to hide our tremendous needs behind a facade because we don't want to let on how needy we really are. That is exactly the opposite of God. God just displays himself in the Scriptures, and that is what God wants from us.

That is what he is doing with David here. He is making David reveal himself. He has squeezed David dry that David might reveal himself. I often think how nice it would have been to have lived back in those days. Then I think again; No it wouldn't. David for the rest of his eternal existence will be displayed by God in the Scriptures. When we get upstairs God is not going to erase 1st and 2nd Samuel and Psalm 51. So I am glad I didn't live during the writing of the Scriptures. I don't think I have a track record I would want exhibited there.

Comment from class: Bob, is it possible God brought about Bathsheba's conception to put David through all this. Because of the conception, it couldn't be hidden.

Bob's response: God probably picked the most fertile time in Bathsheba's whole cycle and that was no accident. God wanted this revealed. David was the king, God's anointed ruler, the example to all Israel. Priests, prophets and kings were God's men; God's vicars; God's substitutes for God. They were the visible manifestation of God in the kingdom of Israel. You were to look at David and see God. You were to look at Nathan and see God. You were to look at Abimelech or Zadok, the high priests, and see God. They were like pastors, elders. They were example Christians. And when God deals with example Christians, he goes first class because they are supposed to be first class. When David sinned he went first class and God dealt with him first class.

Then we have "For I know my transgressions. [I am conscious of my rebellions] and my sin is ever before me." David wants them blotted out. He can't handle his guilt. It is squeezing him dry, and it is doing it night and day. What is one of the basic problems of sin? I can't forget it. I can have remorse and shame and even repentance, but I can't forget the sin. Now God will forget it [speaking anthropomorphically, in human terms] but I don't forget it. So the next time I look God in the face, there is a barrier of my shame and humiliation. My ego has been crushed. I have done something you wouldn't believe, and I can't believe that God has forgotten and blotted it out, even though he says so. So there comes an alienation from God that is not from God. It is from me. I have been forgiven. I have been cleansed but I still have a sense of shame and humiliation. I don't really feel clean. I John 1:9 says, "If you confess your sin, [If you agree with God about your sin] he is faithful and righteous to forgive your sin and to cleanse you from ALL unrighteousness." Why do you feel dirty five minutes later? Because of shame.

Secondly, sin also produces a new chink in your armor. That snowball as it gains mass also gains inertia, resistance to change. The more I say "yes" to sin, the easier it becomes to say "yes" to sin and the more difficult it becomes to say "no." So David knows he has to have this thing dealt with. He does it by facing up to his responsibility.

Verse 4: "Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight. So that [for the purpose; this confession is for the purpose that] Thou [God] art justified when Thou dost speak, [in the context of "judgment"] and blameless when Thou dost judge." David goes right back and points out that his basic sin was against God. Why would that be true? Why is it that any sin, no matter what, is essentially against God? That is true for Christians. But even for non-Christians sin is still against God. What determines if something is sin? Who is the standard of sin? God. Anything that is less than God's character or violates God's will or in any way his creative

order is sinful, whether society recognizes it or not. God did not design a sinful world, "...As through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.." [Rom 5:12] is the Scripture. God designed a world that was perfect [at least in the endemic area] and was to be perfect through the creative and responsible ruling of man as he went out in God's power to carry out God's assignment. So when we sin we violate God's moral order.

When we sin, we deliberately tell God, "Stick it in your ear." So true confession does what? What did it do here? David confessed for the purpose that God might be what, "...justified when Thou dost speak, and blameless when Thou dost judge." True repentance says, "You are right and I am wrong. Whatever you choose to do, you are right. You are just." False repentance justifies me. We rationalize, "You really shouldn't punish me totally, God. I am an Irishman. A violent temper goes with my race. We are known for tempers, for getting in fights. That is just part of me." or "I have a strong sensual nature, God, and you shouldn't blame me for Bathsheba. I am a Latin Jew." Rationalization does not justify God, it justifies me, "You don't have the right to punish me all the way, God. It wasn't really all my fault." On the other hand, true repentance says, "Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned...and done what is evil in Thy sight." In that way I am choosing to justify God instead of myself.

When I justify myself, I am not asking God to forgive my sin, I am asking him to excuse it. I can find no place in all of Scripture where God has made provision for excusing sin. However, there is total provision for forgiveness of sin. So God is not being mean and trying to win the argument when he demands that you justify him. That is the only way to forgiveness.

Then in verses 5 through 9 David makes a plea for spiritual healing. First he sought forgiveness, and now he wants to be made whole again.

Psalms 51:5-9:

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, Thou dost desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part Thou wilt make me know wisdom [Notice the parallelism going through here] Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which Thou hast broken rejoice. Hide Thy face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities.

What does verse 5 indicate is the first step in becoming whole again? "Behold I was brought forth in iniquity [twisted]" What kind of a character did David have when he came out of his mother's womb? Class: Sinful. Bob: Yes! A twisted nature. David sinned because he was a sinner. Adam sinned to become a sinner, but everyone else sins because they are sinners. That is the natural fruit. That little "blossom" that you are just letting grow into a beautiful flower ends up a stinkweed before you know it because we are all born flawed. That is what he is saying here, "And in sin my mother conceived me." That doesn't necessarily mean he was conceived out of wedlock, but in sin his mother brought him forth because she was a sinner. Like produces like. So babies have three strikes on them when they are born. They are born sinners. Doubt me? Who taught your child to bellow his lungs out in the middle of the night for "chow now?" You have had a horrible day with this little savage and daddy has had a rotten day at the office, but junior runs the house, all 18" of him. Now who taught him to be totally self-centered? When he gets to the point where he has a rational mind and can choose, what piece of cake does he choose; the small one, the lowest place? Hardly, he belts little sister in the face and grabs the biggest piece. You trained him to do that did you? No, that is his natural little self.

There is another side to the coin though. Yes, I was born in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me. I was born with a twisted, flawed and fallen nature, but there is an opposite, Jesus Christ. In exchange for my twisted nature I can have the nature of God.

So the first thing David does is acknowledge he is lost. He could promise God all he wanted that he would never do it again, but he knows he can't. The next time temptation comes along, he may fall. So he tells God, "I can't solve my own problem." He can't move. He can't change jobs. He can't change wives. He can't change anything. Besides what is the problem with trying any of these things? The problem is that I go with them, and I am the

problem. Remember the famous theologian Pogo, "We have met the enemy, and he is us." If I try to kid myself that I am not the problem, I can spend my whole life running around to different jobs, different locations, different environments, different wives, different husbands, whatever, but unfortunately the problem goes right with me. The day I face up to the fact that I am a twisted, flawed and fallen creature and that I am the problem, healing begins.

We can see this in verse 6, "Behold," he says, "Thou dost desire truth in the innermost being [he had been living in deceit] and in the hidden part Thou will make me know wisdom." How does he know this is true? What does the Old Testament state is one of the requirements as king [Deut. 17:14-20]? He is to be a man of the word. God's purpose in making man is written right in the Old Testament. God made us "in his image and in his likeness." It doubles it in intensity. God made me to be a godly person.

David knows he was not designed to be an adulterer and a murderer. He was designed to have truth in his innermost being and for his hidden parts to know wisdom. The word for "wisdom" is the word to discern good from evil. God did not design David to be this way. David has made some bad choices. So he says, "Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." He pleads with God to cleanse him. He uses an interesting term with hyssop. Hyssop was the little bush they used to dip in the blood and sprinkle things in the ceremony of cleansing. One of the things they would sprinkle was a cleansed leper. Once the leprosy had been dealt with and was no longer infectious, the leper could go to a priest and go through a ceremonial cleansing. The priest would dip the hyssop in blood and sprinkle him with blood seven times. It was symbolic that he was clean before God. Scarred, yes. He may have the leper's complete whiteness. He may have lost fingers, but he was clean before God. David compared to the purity of God sees himself kind of as a leper, but he knows even a scarred leper when he is clean is accepted.

Comment from class: Did that ever happen?

Bob's response: Oh, yes! There is Miriam. When Miriam and Aaron, brother and sister of Moses, chose to dishonor Moses by saying, "How come you get to be the big shot? We're of the same blood. We're the same family. In fact Aaron is your mouthpiece." God called the three of them out in the tent of meeting [Numbers 12]. He said, "How dare you speak about Moses like that? To others I speak in dreams and visions, but to Moses I speak face-to-face. How dare you talk to him like that!" Immediately Miriam became leprous; white as snow. Aaron pleaded with Moses to intercede with God, but God said for her to stay outside the camp for seven days and then he cleansed her. God, in his grace, did cleanse lepers, but one of the things recognizable in the Old Testament was any cleansing of leprosy was a gift of God. Only God could do it. There was no other way they could cleanse lepers. That is what Christ was telling them when he cleansed the lepers. He was saying, "Hey! God is here." The Jews of all people knew leprosy could only be cleansed by God, and Christ was all over the place cleansing lepers

A cleansed leper would still be a scarred person. A cleansed David is still a scarred person, and he sees himself as a leper here. He says, "Make me to hear joy and gladness. Let the bones which Thou hast broken rejoice." He wants to be out from under the crushing weight of sin and guilt and back singing joyfully to the Lord. His words are a beautiful illustration of the mark of true repentance. God has so crushed him with guilt that he says here, "Let the bones which THOU hast broken rejoice," as well as saying, "Make me to hear joy and gladness."

A truly repentant person exhibits thankfulness with no resentment or bitterness. They justify God. They agree with God, "That was necessary in my life," knowing that God only does what is necessary to accomplish his purpose. David is that way. He has been promised by God that the sword will never depart from his house, that his own wives will be raped in front of all of Israel. He is going to have nothing but tumult for the rest of his reign. The child born of this illicit union is going to die. God has told him all these things and has also given him the squeeze for at least one whole year, and he knows it is from God, "The bones which YOU have broken."

Lastly, "Hide Thy face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities." He seeks the ultimate of spiritual healing which is eyeball-to-eyeball with a Holy God with no sense of shame, and he knows there is no possibility in the

law to have that kind of healing.

That is one of the hardest thing to get across to people. I do not care what your sin is, if you truly confess it, you can look eyeball-to-eyeball with you God, "who is a Holy God who dwells in light unapproachable and who no man has seen or ever can see" and have no sense of shame. He really means it, my friends, when he says, "if you confess your sins [if you agree with God, that is what it says, if you justify God and not excuse yourself] he will not only forgive your sin, but he will cleanse you from all unrighteousness." A murderer, adulterer, hypocrite for over a year, a man who sent men to their death for the very thing he had done, who led worship while knowing he was hiding sin, if he confesses his sin, God says, "You can look me in the face, eyeball-to-eyeball. I will hide my face from your sins and blot out your iniquities." This is the figure used. It doesn't say God is going to forget them. God can't throw away his mind, but he can give you the ability to grasp what he has done in your life, and you can look eyeball-to-eyeball at him and have no sense of shame for what you have done. He expresses that cleansing here as blotting it out, hiding it from his face, or putting it behind his back in the depths of the sea. God again goes first class. When he forgives, he forgets [These are human terms] and from that point on there should never ever be any shame between you and God over a truly confessed sin no matter what it was.

Comment from class: I asked awhile back about why Solomon was allowed to reign. Is that the answer, once it's over and David is forgiven, that is it?

Bob's response: God deliberately chooses the next child of that union because why? What had David done about the union? He went to his wife and comforted her. He began to love her as a woman, as a wife. Up to now she has been a useful object to satisfy his lust or a problem to get rid of. But when God broke him, he went to her and comforted her, and she shifted from "Uriah's wife" to "his wife." Because he had already confessed when Bathsheba conceived Solomon, he was a child of a godly marriage. Yes, the marriage came about by adultery and murder, but it was cleansed so they could actually have a godly marriage. So God said, "Call him Solomon. He is going to build my temple, David. And more than that, call him Jedidiah, 'beloved of Yahweh.' That is how thoroughly I have cleansed you from sin and forgotten it. You do not have to look me in the eye with shame at all."

We'll get verses 10-19 of Psalm 51 and then in chapter 13 of II Samuel, we will begin to see the wages of sin worked out in the life of the family of David. This gorgeous Psalm does not stop the consequences of David's sin. He has total fellowship, eyeball-to-eyeball, with a Holy God, but the consequences of that sin continue to work themselves out. It is a tragic thing.

Father, we just thank you so much for the cleansing and forgiveness that we get from you. We who are born twisted and choose twistedness, Father, and by confession to you have full forgiveness and full cleansing. We your creatures can look you right in the eye even though you dwell in light unapproachable who no man has seen nor can see you are so holy, pure and yet we can look at you with no shame, no sense of guilt, totally as if we had never sinned because of the work of Jesus Christ our Lord and our God in whose name we pray. Amen.

[Back to Bob Roe's Index Page](#)

