

Real Repentance From a Real Sinner

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[0 : 00] So we're going to turn now to our Bible reading. And this morning we're going to be turning to a well-known Psalm, Psalm 51.

And Phil Coupland will be opening this up for us as he preaches to us a little later. But we're going to read together the whole Psalm now. If you don't have a Bible, there are plenty of red ones, as you can see at the sides, at the back, do grab one and turn to Psalm 51, and we'll read together. To the choir master, a psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. 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 conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth, in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

[1 : 36] 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. Blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew your 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.

[2 : 38] 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 you will delight in right sacrifices, and burnt offerings, and whole burnt offerings.

Then bulls will be offered on your altar. Amen. Amen. This is God's word, and we'll return to it shortly.

Well, please do have your Bibles open to Psalm 51. That'll be most helpful. Well, I wonder, when was the last time someone said words to you that revealed the humbling truth about you?

I once went to a gym, believe it or not, for a free fitness test. I think you all know where this is going. After about six minutes on the treadmill, I looked like I was going to die, and I felt like I was going to die.

[4 : 01] And the fitness instructor said to me, I don't know what he was trying to achieve with this, but he said to me, Mr. Copeland, your fitness is shocking. Needless to say, I didn't get a membership there.

I probably should have, and I should still, but there we go. But those words revealed a humbling truth to me, about me. And often, that is the Christian's experience when we encounter the Word of God.

Now, of course, God's Word often encourages us, comforts us, fills us with great assurance and joy, and builds us up. But it's also true, isn't it, that very often, the Word of God reveals humbling truths, maybe even painful truths, to us, about us.

Never to drive us to despair, never to utterly break us down, completely, to a point of no return. But the Word of God does break us, in order to turn us, to lovingly bring us back to the Lord, the God of

our salvation, and to deepen our faith, and to deepen our knowledge, of His great mercy, and His covenant love.

And this is what the Word of God did, in the life of King David. It's what Psalm 51 is all about. And you can see from the short title, that it was written by David, after the events, that were recorded in 2 Samuel 11 and 12, where David, the great king of Israel, a man after God's own heart, he found himself, tragically, on a disastrous conveyor belt of sin.

[5 : 42] It all began at a time, when kings were out fighting, and David should have been there, but he didn't. He stayed at home. And one late afternoon, he was looking out from his rooftop, and he sees a beautiful woman bathing.

And instead of fleeing, David sends a servant, to find out who she is. And the servant tells him, that's Bathsheba. And she's married, to Uriah the Hittite.

Uriah was one of David's top soldiers, who was currently out of town, fighting for David and God's people. And despite knowing this, David sends for Bathsheba, and he commits adultery with her. And of course, time passes, and Bathsheba sends David a message, doesn't she? She says, I'm pregnant. I'm expecting. And so David begins a desperate scheme, to try and cover up his sin. He calls back Uriah, from the front line, and he says to him, oh Uriah my brother, go home. Enjoy time with your wife. Go and be with her. And really, David was doing that, so that he would make it look like, the baby was Uriah's, and not his.

[6 : 52] But that doesn't work. Uriah is a man of honor, and he refuses to enjoy his marital privileges, during wartime. And so in the end, David sends Uriah back to the front line, and he gives instructions, to his top commander, Joab.

And he says, make sure Uriah is taken, to the point in the front line, where the fighting is at its fiercest. And when attack comes, draw back. Draw back with all your men. Isolate Uriah, so that he will certainly be killed.

And friends, that's exactly what happens. David, murdered, Uriah. And with Uriah out of the way, David takes Bathsheba to be his wife, and when the child is born, it all seems to be legitimate. David thought that he'd cover up his sin. But you can't hide anything, from the Lord. And the last sentence of 2 Samuel 11, is very sobering. It says this, but the thing that David had done, displeased the Lord.

And because the Lord is so gracious, because the Lord is so kind, actually, he sent his word, to confront David. Via the prophet Nathan. And you remember, that Nathan comes to David, and David tells him this story, this parable of a man, who carries out, this horrible, evil act of injustice.

[8 : 16] And David, it gets his blood boiling. He's so furious and angry. And he says to Nathan, oh, tell me who this is. The man who's done this, deserves to die. And there you have the sledgehammer moment, where Nathan looks at David and says, you are the man.

You're the man that's done this. Why did you despise the word of the Lord, by doing what is evil in his eyes? You see, the word of God revealed, a humbling and painful truth to David, about himself, about what he's done.

And Psalm 51 is written in response, to all of that. Because this is a prayer of real repentance, from a real sinner. It's full of humbling truths, about not just David, but actually all of us, all of our hearts. But it's also full of glorious hope, hope that we all need to hear. And I want us to look at the Psalm under these kind of two headings, two things that David has learned, two things that we too must learn, if we're to be a people marked by real repentance.

Here's the first thing David learned. Number one, his own heart is deeply sinful. His own heart is deeply sinful. David humbly confesses the depravity, of his rebellious heart.

[9 : 39] Let's read verses one to three again. David says, 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. So friends, this is a voice of a broken man, who's been rightly humbled, and deeply convicted by the word of God.

David knows that he's guilty. He doesn't question God's verdict on his life, but he confesses, which basically means he agrees with God's verdict, that he's heard from Nathan.

And I wondered, do you notice when I read it out there, the repetition of me and my, that comes up again and again and again. David doesn't suffer from what I call BSE, which is blame someone else syndrome, or blame something else syndrome.

He admits fully that he's responsible for what he's done. There's no excuses. When I was roughly 11 years old, I was walking home from school, and a friend of mine called Craig, walking, we're walking together, and walking further ahead up the road, was a particular girl in the class, that I maybe just perhaps wanted to get her attention, because I quite liked her at the time.

[11 : 10] And my friend Craig gave me some advice, that he thought was brilliant. He said, throw a stone at her. I said, what?

He said, throw a stone at her, she'll love that. I bet she'll love that. And for some reason, I thought that was the best advice, best love advice in the world ever. So I did.

And at that day, I realized that my future didn't lie in cricket, because she was up there, and I threw my stone, and it went over there. And it went, it smashed right through the back windshield, of a very expensive car.

And I bolted. Friends, I bolted. I was ashamed, and I was afraid, and I bolted. But eventually, I was caught, and I rightly stood before the school headmistress.

And she said, well, what have you got to say for yourself, Mr. Copeland? And like that, immediately, the first words that came out of my mouth were, Craig told me to do it. It was Craig's idea. It was Craig.

[12 : 11] B.S.E. Blame someone else syndrome. And friends, ever since Genesis 3, that is the sad reality about human beings. By nature, we so often try to distance ourselves from our sin, often blaming someone else, or something else.

Just think back to the garden. Think back to the first act of rebellion by Adam and Eve. When the Lord graciously confronted them with his word about their sin.

And what did they do? What did the women say? Well, the serpent. The serpent tempted me. And Adam, what did he say? He said to God, the woman whom you gave me, gave me the fruit.

Blame someone else syndrome. We also hear it, do we not? Sometimes, and I'm certainly guilty of this in my life. I wonder if this is true of your life. But when we apologize to other people sometimes, we like to throw in little, subtle excuses to try and lessen the blow of, try and justify ourselves.

We say things like, I'm really sorry I snapped at you there. I'm just, I'm so tired. I'm really sorry about, I'm really, I didn't mean to do that to you. Really, it's just, I'm under a lot of stress.

[13 : 25] I'm under a lot of stress at work. It's little things. B.S.E. Blame someone else syndrome. Blame something else syndrome. But that's not what David does.

David doesn't do that before the Lord. This is real repentance. Repentance that has been brought about by the powerful word of God knows that we've got nowhere to hide. It's marked by humble honesty.

Humble honesty. David is saying, Lord, have mercy on me for I am a sinner. I cannot hide this. I am guilty. I am responsible. I've got no excuses.

Do you notice the words that David uses to describe sin here? Verse 1, he talks about my transgressions. That is a word that is describing the deliberate breaking of God's law.

The deliberate rejection of his life-giving commands. Verse 2, he speaks about my iniquity. And the word there really describes the fact that his inner life is bent and twisted out of shape.

[14 : 27] As Martin Luther says, it's curved in on itself. It's a way from God. Again, verse 2, he says, my sin. And that's really the most common Hebrew word throughout the Bible, the Old Testament for sin, which means to miss the mark, not just slightly, but to fall short by miles of what it really means to be truly human.

You see, friends, David isn't simply just confessing about the particular sin that he's committed with Bathsheba. But rather, he is also confessing that sin has polluted and warped every part of his human fiber.

Technically, we call it total depravity. Now, just look at verse 4. Look what he says there. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.

Just think about all the people whom David has sinned against. Just think about what he did in 2 Samuel 11. He sinned against his own body with his sexual sin. He sinned against Uriah.

He sinned against Bathsheba. He sinned against Joab, his commanding officer, and all the soldiers involving them in murder. And since David is the king of Israel and the federal head, the covenantal head of the nation, David actually sinned against everyone.

[15 : 48] So there isn't actually one person whom David hasn't sinned against. He sinned against everyone. So what's verse 4 all about? Well, I take it verse 4 is this.

David knows that at the end of the day, all sin, all sin is fundamentally at its root and basis an attack against God. God is our creator, sustainer, lawgiver, lifegiver.

We are not autonomous beings. And every action that we do that does not adhere to God's moral commands is always an attack against him. It's always an attempt to dethrone him from his rightful position.

It's treason against the king of kings. And so David's priority isn't to be forgiven by human beings, although that is important, that is important, but his priority first and foremost is to be right with God. Put it like this, sin this way between us and God is far more serious than sin this way between human beings. In fact, what I'm saying is sin this way between human beings is really at the end of the day sin this way always against God.

[17:00] And so David says in verse 4, look Lord, you're right, you're right, you're right, your verdict on me is right, I'm deserving of judgment, I'm deserving of condemnation. And he goes on in verse 5 to describe just how deep the problem goes.

Verse 5, Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in my sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth and the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

Now just be careful, friends, what David isn't saying there is that sex in and of itself is a sinful or evil thing. Rather, what David is acknowledging here, is what God has already taught him in his inner heart, in his secret heart.

And that is the fact that sin is so deep in his heart that it has been there throughout all of David's existence, throughout all of David's life and history. Listen to how one commentator puts it.

David sees that his crime was no freak accident. It was no freak accident. It was in his character an extreme expression of the warped creature.

[18:09] He has always been and of the faulty stock from which he sprung. Now friends, this is very humbling stuff, isn't it?

It's very humbling stuff, very sobering, very sobering. I wonder what you make of it. Because friends, the Bible says that these things are not just true of David.

They're true of all of us. They're true of all of us. They're true of you and they're true of me.

Jeremiah 17 verse 9 says, The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick.

I'll just think of the Lord Jesus' words. Mark chapter 7. Jesus says this, What comes out of a person is what defiles him for from within. Out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these things come from within and they defile a person. It's like Jesus is x-raying the human heart of all of our hearts.

[19:23] He says, We might not be guilty of the same specific sins that David committed externally, but internally, well, we all have that potential. You see, friends, when we read about David's sin, when we read this psalm, Psalm 51, we're not to sit here and think, Oh, that's dreadful.

Oh, I'm so thankful I'm not like that. I'm so thankful I could never do that. Actually, the gospel of God declares to all of us that our hearts are just as capable of the same sins as David.

Now, my friend, if you're an honest person who's being truly honest with yourself, then you'll know that this is so. You're not what you should be. I am not what I should be.

This passage really frightens me as a person who's in a position of leadership over God's people. If it can happen to David, my goodness. Our hearts, by nature, are deeply sinful and we cannot hide it from the Lord.

And, you know, maybe you're here this morning and just maybe you're feeling in exactly the same way that David felt when the Word of God confronted him. Maybe the Word of God has confronted you and exposed the sin problem in your heart.

[20:42] Maybe you feel as though the Lord has crushed your bones. you feel so terrible about what is done. You feel so convicted by the guilt and shame. Maybe you have fallen into a pattern of behavior that you know is not pleasing to God.

Maybe you've messed up big time. Maybe perhaps somebody at work or something said to you, you're not a Christian, are you? And you went, oh, no, no, no, no, no. Just because you didn't want to get mocked.

You've maybe messed up big time and like David, you just feel so crushed by guilt. Well, friends, Psalm 51 is for all of us this morning. By the power of the Holy Spirit, let's all seek to follow David's prayer of real repentance.

Let's not try and hide from the Lord our God or try and blame something or someone else. Instead, let's be honest. Lord Almighty, my heart is deeply sinful. I am guilty, responsible.

You are just to judge and right to condemn me. I have sinned against you alone. That's the first step, friend, in real repentance.

[21 : 49] And that's the first thing David learned. But let's move on to the hope. Let's go to where David goes to for hope because there is great hope. This is the second thing David learned, second point this morning.

His own heart is deeply sinful, but at the same time he's learned his only hope is divine salvation. His only hope is divine salvation.

David humbly trusts in God alone to cleanse and renew his heart. And David trusts with actually great confidence because he knows the Lord and he knows what the Lord has promised.

So yes, the word of God has revealed the painful truth to David, but at the same time it drives David to the Lord's mercy and to his steadfast love and he calls out to the Lord to cleanse him and to create a new heart within him.

Let's just look back quickly at verse 1 please. Look how he begins. He says, Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy.

[22 : 54] So he begins by saying, O Lord, please don't punish me the way that I deserve to be punished. That's what it means to receive mercy. I appeal to your mercy. And really, that's the prayer that's pleasing to the Lord.

That's what he wants from sinners. Remember Luke chapter 18 when the Lord Jesus tells many parables? One of the parables that he tells is one where a religious tax collector and someone who was seen as a scumbag by society, a tax collector, they both go into the temple to pray before the Lord at the same time.

The Pharisee approaches God as though he's doing God a favor. And he says, God, I thank you that I'm not like other men. I'm not like this tax collector. Look how good I am. Look at what I've done.

But what does the tax collector do? The tax collector seems to actually pray, Psalm 51 verse 1, have mercy on me, O God, a sinner.

And Jesus says that the shock of the parable is that the scumbag tax collector leaves the temple right before God and not the proud, self-righteous, religious man.

[24 : 04] Friends, the only hope for sinners is not to rely on our own goodness or performance to show God how good we've been, but it's to rely upon His undeserved kindness and mercy.

And David knows that. And so in verse 1, that's how he begins and he appeals, notice, to God's steadfast love. The Hebrew word for that, I'm sure you'll remember, is hesed, which is the special word for God, special, unmerited, committed love.

Love that He shows only to His covenant people. Not because of any worthiness in us, but because He graciously obligates Himself to do so.

It's love, if you like, that depends solely upon God Himself. And so it is to that covenant love that David makes us please. He says, O Lord, according to Your covenant love, Your committed love, please blot out my sin, wash me, cleanse me.

In other words, David is describing himself as a filthy garment, a filthy rag, deeply polluted, and in desperate need of divine cleansing.

[25 : 13] Now today, in the 21st century, we have some amazing washing machines, you know. My boys are two, you know, how old's he? Three. I had to think about that there. Sorry.

My youngest son has recently turned three, which is why I nearly said he was two, but he's three. And my eldest son is seven. Our washing machine never stops. There's stains galore, you know, and it's really easy to deal with, you know.

Get the t-shirt out, bring a bit of vanish on it, chuck it in the machine, high temperature. Yeah, beauty. It comes out looking clean like that. I don't have to do anything other than that. But it was a different matter back in David's time.

Yes? No hot point back in David's day. No Daz, no vanish spray. The first readers of the psalm knew exactly what a painstaking process it was to wash a filthy thing by hand.

You scrubbed, you scrubbed, you scrubbed, you scrubbed over and over and over again. You washed and washed until things were eventually clean. And that's what David's asking God to do with him.

[26 : 18] Please do that with me. Do it with my heart. Look at verse seven. He says, 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. Now, hyssop was a bushy plant used to make someone ceremonially clean.

And we've heard about this recently when Stephen Bangle preached on Leviticus on Sunday evenings. Back in the day, the camp of Israel as they made its way through the wilderness, if anyone contracted an infectious skin disease or came into contact with a dead body, they were pronounced unclean.

And that was devastating because they were then cast out of the camp away from fellowship with God's people and away from the special presence of God in the middle of the camp in the tabernacle.

But as I'm sure you know, God in his grace provided a way for unclean people to be made clean. The priest would sacrifice an animal without blemish and the priest would then take a bunch of hyssop branches and dip them into the blood of the sacrifice and would sprinkle them upon the unclean person.

[27 : 37] And that was a sign that the sacrifice had died in the place of the unclean person and that the sinner was pronounced clean. And just think of the joy and celebration and the relief that must have flooded into the heart of the one who was declared clean and welcomed back in to the camp.

Back into fellowship with God. Back in amongst his people. That is precisely what David is speaking about in verses seven and eight. He says, Lord, I'm just like the leper.

Please cleanse me. Please cleanse me. But let me just say, it's not obvious from our translation, but I actually think the tone here is one of great confidence.

Yes, he's broken, but I think this is a tone of great confidence. Verse seven could actually be translated as this. You shall purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean.

You shall wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. I take it these are really great cries of great faith. Really what David is saying here is, Lord, I know what you've promised in your law, the law of Moses.

[28 : 43] I know that you've revealed to us the way of cleansing, which is through the washing, through the purging of your appointed sacrifice. Lord, you have promised that through this way, your appointed way, you will make sinners clean.

And so, Lord, I call on you to act upon your gracious covenant promises. Not that I deserve it. I'm not presuming upon your grace. I know I'm guilty, but I'm asking you to show mercy.

And I know that it will be so because with you, Lord, there are no half measures. You're a God who always keeps your promises. Now, friends, as the covenant people of God today, we should actually have much more assurance, much more confidence, much more hope than even David had back then.

Why? Well, because we have received the fullness of the revelation of the cleansing blood of the everlasting covenant. In other words, we can and we really should have much more assurance, confidence, and hope than David because the Lord Jesus has come and laid down his life on the cross for us, dying as the perfect sacrifice of atonement for sin once and for all.

He came and was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. Well, David's prayer doesn't end with a request for cleansing.

[30 : 17] There's more. He continues to show that his only hope is divine salvation by asking God to bring about a new creation within him. Please look at verse 10. David says, Create in me a clean heart of 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.

So David prays that the Lord will not remove his spirit from him like he did with King Saul but rather David wants God's spirit to transform his heart. And again, David knows that this transformation is only something that God can bring about.

David is powerless in this situation. Without God, apart from God, he can do nothing. That's clear from verse 10 from the fact that the word in Hebrew there for create is only ever used in the Bible to describe God's activity.

This is only something God can do. For example, back in Genesis 1 when God created the world out of nothing. And in the same way, David is calling on the Lord to create out of the deadness of his heart out of the nothingness there, a new heart.

[31 : 34] Transformed. One that seeks to live a holy life. One that loves the Lord, wants to obey his commands and delights in knowing him. Only a divine miracle, a work of the spirit, a work of divine creation can bring about such transformation.

And David gives his reasons as to why he wants God to change his heart in verse 13 to 15. You see, a heart that's been washed and renewed by the mercy of God is a heart that will proclaim God's goodness to others.

Just run your eye, please, over verse 13 to 15. And notice the repetition of stuff to do with speech or proclaiming God's goodness.

David says he will teach transgressors how to turn back to God. My tongue, he says, will sing God's righteousness of God's righteousness. My lips and mouth will declare your praise.

David is motivated by God's glory. But friends, we must make sure we get this the right way around because David is saying, I'm only going to do these things after I've confessed my sin and after I've been cleansed and renewed.

[32 : 45] Not the other way around. All right? These are things that David is going to do in response to God's gracious saving work and restoration. They are not the basis of the saving work.

That is what David says in verse 16 to 17. Look at what he says. 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. Oh God, you will not despise. God's people fall into sin and when we are convicted of it by the power of God's word, we can often think just really far out thoughts.

We can think thoughts like these. I'm going to conquer this. I'm going to make it up to God. I can sort out this relationship. I can bring about restoration. I'm going to get back to true worship in my life.

I'm going to get that up and running again. What I'll do is I will show fresh devotion to God. I'll start a disciplined prayer program and I have a lot of good quality quiet times.

[33 : 56] Yeah, that's what I need to do. Get back to my Bible. Yeah, yeah. Maybe even try a bit of evangelism. Maybe even sign up for a new serving position in church. Yeah, if I just do these spiritual disciplines, everything will be peachy again and the Lord will be pleased with me.

Friends, if we think that and it is common for us to think that, I've certainly thought that in the past, it's a mistake. Look at verse 16. David says, for you will not delight in sacrifice or I would give it. You will not be pleased with a burnt offering. What does God want from us first and foremost before anything when we turn back to Him having been stuck in sin? He wants verse 17.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart. Oh God, you will not despise. And what does that look like?

What does that sound like? Answer? Psalm 51. That's what it looks like and sounds like. God wants you to come to Him and honestly confess my own heart is deeply sinful.

[35 : 04] God wants you to trust in His mercy and steadfast love that sent the Lord Jesus into the world. My only hope is divine salvation.

Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to your cross I cling. And then after that of course turn to the Lord and offer sacrifices in your life.

Sacrifices of praise and service. Friends, when we come to God this way the Psalm 51 way then we really can have great assurance that the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse us and the spirit of Christ will continue to create in us a new heart.

Psalm 51 is a beautiful prayer of real repentance from a real sinner who trusts in the real gospel of God. God, if the cries of David's heart are the cries of your heart then I think you should be greatly encouraged for the Lord our God will not despise.

well, amen. Let's bow our heads and we'll pray together. Let's pray. our Lord and Heavenly Father we cast ourselves solely upon your mercy solely upon the precious blood of your Son the Lord Jesus we thank you that in him we stand forgiven washed and cleansed from sin help us to always be a people marked by real repentance help us to always return to the Lord Jesus for cleansing honestly confessing our sins when we mess up.

[36 : 54] Please Father continue to create in us a pure heart by your Spirit so that we will be a people and a church who will sing the praises of your great salvation so that you will receive glory and we pray this in Jesus precious name Amen.