

EASTER SUNDAY

PSALM 51

Easter Sunday morning, 2023: Psalm 51

Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 9th April 2023 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Psalm 51:1-19

Psalm 51

I'm going to start our study this morning with a true story.

2 Samuel 11:1-27

It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house. And the woman conceived; so she sent and told David, and said, "I am with child."

Then David sent to Joab, saying, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah had come to him, David asked how Joab was doing, and how the people were doing, and how the war prospered. And David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah departed from the king's house, and a gift of food from the king followed him. But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. So when they told David, saying, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "Did you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?"

And Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are dwelling in tents, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open fields. Shall I then go to my house to eat and drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing."

Then David said to Uriah, "Wait here today also, and tomorrow I will let you depart." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. Now when David called him, he ate and drank before him; and he made him drunk. And at evening he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

In the morning it happened that David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retreat from him, that he may be struck down and die." So it was, while Joab besieged the city, that he assigned Uriah to a place where he knew there were valiant men. Then the men of the city came out and fought with Joab. And some of the people of the servants of David fell; and Uriah the Hittite died also.

Then Joab sent and told David all the things concerning the war, and charged the messenger, saying, "When you have finished telling the matters of the war to the king, if it happens that the king's wrath rises, and he says to you: 'Why did you approach so near to the city when you fought? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? Who struck Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Was it not a woman who cast a piece of a millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez? Why did you go near the wall?'—then you shall say, 'Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.' "

So the messenger went, and came and told David all that Joab had sent by him. And the messenger said to David, "Surely the men prevailed against us and came out to us in the field; then we drove them back as far as the entrance of the gate. The archers shot from the wall at your servants; and some of the king's servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also."

Then David said to the messenger, "Thus you shall say to Joab: 'Do not let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another. Strengthen your attack against the city, and overthrow it.' So encourage him."

When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. And when her mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.

That of course is the account we read in 2 Samuel chapter 11, of David's sin with Bathsheba. And it *should* shock us. I'll never forget, when teaching through 2 Samuel at our youth club Bible study that we used to have on Sunday evenings, the picture on Eilish's face as she heard that account for the first time. Her jaw dropped. And if we dismiss this account this morning as just one of those things that happened, rather than let us be shocked by it - we're missing something.

David had stooped to real depths. He had lusted, committed adultery, and tried to cover his tracks by getting Uriah to spend the night with his wife. When that didn't happen, he had intentionally got him drunk in another attempt. When that didn't work, he arranged his death - ultimately sanctioning the murder of a man who was loyal to him. And he thought he had got away with it. Indeed, in the final verses that we read, we see at least 9 months pass. And no-one says a word.

But then we read in the next chapter of 2 Samuel:

2 Samuel 12:1-15

Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: "There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him."

So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity."

Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and 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 also would have given you much more! Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.' "

So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die." Then Nathan departed to his house.

So Nathan faithfully delivered the message from the Lord — certainly with risk to his own life — and confronts David. Saying, "you are the man!". Not in a good way. Not "you're the man!". But "you are guilty before the Lord". "You are the one who has done this wickedness that you so despised".

And there he is. His sin is exposed. And here we are. And isn't that just like us? In case you doubt that, remember what we recently studied in Romans chapter 2:

Romans 2:1-3

Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?

That is, “you are the man too”. Whether male or female – you have offended God too. You have sinned against Him. *Oh, but I’ve not murdered anyone!* Good! I hope that’s the case. The person sat next to you will probably sleep better at night if that’s so. But you’ve still sinned. *Oh, but I’ve not committed adultery.* Perhaps not. But you think that’s where the law stops?

Paul, notes how he realised he had broken the law. We read in Romans 7:7...

Romans 7:7

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.”

That is, he realised the spiritual nature of the law when it said “You shall not covet”. Before that, he could easily think he had kept it – he’d not worshiped other gods, not made idols, he’d kept the sabbath. Early in his life he’d neither murdered, stolen or committed adultery. But covet? That wasn’t something he could do with his hands. That was something he did with his heart. And the law revealed his heart to be the problem. As has been well said, the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. Jeremiah the prophet wrote:

Jeremiah 17:9-10

“The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.

And Jesus Himself taught that it was not only our actions, but our thoughts that could be sinful. We read in Matthew chapter 5:

Matthew 5:27-28

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

So then, God is not only cares greatly about your actions, but your intents. What is it you really desire? Are you lusting after what you don’t have, or coveting what others have?

We read in Hebrews:

Hebrews 4:12-13

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

We can't treat the Bible lightly, as if it's some sort of motivational quote that God left for us that says "try and be a bit nicer". Nor can we fight against it - for we won't come off well.

The law then, as we've looked at in recent weeks, is set against us — it doesn't help us, but rather it leaves us helpless. We read in Romans chapter 3:

Romans 3:19-20

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Like a mirror can only tell you that you're dirty — and not wash you — so the law only reveals our need for a Saviour, and doesn't save us itself. That's why we read in Galatians chapter 3:

Galatians 3:24

Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

So like David was confronted by Nathan, so we have been confronted by the law which says "you are the man!" — you are guilty before a just and holy God.

So what is our response? Well, let's look at Psalm 51 - for this is the very Psalm that David wrote following Nathan exposing his sin. We read in the opening verses:

Psalm 51:1-2

Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin.

So first, David recognises he is in trouble before a just and holy God - he needs His mercy. That God *wouldn't* give him what he deserves. There is nothing he has done to merit God's mercy, and he can only appeal to God's nature & character, in hope that he might be washed and cleansed from his sin - that he might be justified. That he might be seen just as he had never sinned.

And this crying out to God is where we are to start too. Not like the Pharisee in Luke 18 who said "God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector." but rather we are to be like the tax collector who, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

Psalm 51:3-6

For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight—That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.

So David acknowledges his sin and repents. That is he turns his heart toward the Lord.

First he recognises sin for what it is. And that it is against God. You might think he would have said how sorry he was for sleeping with another man's wife. Or ordering Uriah's murder. Or for breaving Bathsheba of her husband. In short, we might think that David would have been sorry for how he treated others. And while I'm sure that he was sorry, that's not what *sin* is. Sin is missing the mark in God's eyes. Sure, we hurt others in the process — that's partly why God says we shouldn't do it! — but ultimately when we sin, it is God we offend.

And David acknowledges that this sin nature — this desire to sin — has been present since birth. No-one needed to teach him how to sin. It came naturally! And those of you that have raised children know very well that you don't need to teach them how to sin.

Furthermore, David realises and acknowledges that it is not just his actions that are sinful, but the thoughts of his heart. For that's exactly where sin starts. That every affair starts in the head before it occurs in the bed. And that his only hope is that God Himself would make him to know wisdom in his inward parts – that is, in his heart. How this should remind us of what we recently read in Romans 7:

Romans 7:24-25a

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

And David now pleads with God:

Psalm 51:7-9

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, That the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities.

What does he mean by *purge me with hyssop*? Well the first mention of hyssop is in Exodus chapter 12 where we see that Moses instructs the children of Israel at the first passover, to dip hyssop — an evergreen herb — in the blood of the sacrificed lamb, and use the hyssop to apply that blood to the lintels and doorposts of their homes, that they might be passed over and not destroyed. And so David is asking the Lord to remove his sin through the applying of the blood of an innocent lamb. Then, and then only — David says — shall he be clean. So clean that he would be whiter than snow. Let's note Isaiah's words...

Isaiah 1:18

Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.

That is what God has done for us through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Remember John the Baptist's words... *"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*. Jesus was the perfect Lamb that God provided, which Abraham had foretold to Isaac that He would provide, as they stood before Calvary many years before.

David then makes this request, that God would make him hear joy and gladness. I'm sure that appeals to all of us. But then he says "that the bones You have broken may rejoice". What is David talking about? Well, David — who was once a shepherd of his fathers flocks — would have been familiar with a practice that at first seems harsh to us today. After all, we're so disconnected from the realities of all things farming that we wouldn't even eat vegetables if we knew where they came from. But Jon Courson notes:

As a shepherd, David understood the meaning of broken bones. You see, when a lamb would stubbornly and rebelliously continue to wander away from the flock, the shepherd would break its legs and place the lamb on his shoulder where it would remain until its bone was healed. When the lamb could again walk, so bonded was he with the shepherd, he would never stray again. Like sheep, we all go astray (Isaiah 53:6). Therefore, in His love, the Good Shepherd breaks a bone or two and carries me while I whine and cry and wonder what He's doing. But as the days and weeks and months go by, I find myself closer to Him than I had ever been previously, and all I can say is, "Thank You, Lord." Part of shepherding means breaking a bone or two.

Jon Courson

That breaking of bones seems harsh in the moment, but it was done with love, and it led to both immediate safety of the sheep and a closeness to the shepherd. As for us, God does this too. For example, didn't it hurt when God ended that job you were obsessed by? Didn't it hurt when God ended that wrong relationship you were pursuing? Didn't it hurt when God removed that idol from your life? Yes - but did that not result in one of the closest times you had with the Lord? Did it not result in you yielding to Him? Walking with Him? Obeying His every command? He does this, not to punish us, but to protect us.

We read in Proverbs chapter 3:

Proverbs 3:11-12

My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor detest His correction; For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights.

Jesus paid such a high price for our Salvation, to pay for all our sin, to blot out all our iniquity (as David writes). And He is too kind to leave us as we are. And rather than us desire to sin, we find a new desire to please Him, as we read David write in verse 10...

Psalms 51:10-11

Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

This isn't a desire to be forgiven so we can sin more. But a heart that now wants to please God. But how can that happen when our hearts are desperately wicked? Well, we read in Romans 8:

Romans 8:2-4

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

How can we have a clean heart? By the Holy Spirit living in us. By walking in the Spirit. By minding the things of the Spirit. That means spending time in His Word, and spending time in prayer. We have that great promise of course in James 4, that if we draw near to God, He will draw near to us. And David himself wrote in Psalm 119:

Psalm 119:9-11

How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.

As we spend time in God's word, and in prayer to our Saviour — both speaking to Him, and very importantly, allowing Him to speak to us — we will find that His Holy Spirit will indeed create a clean heart in us. Giving us love for things once hated, and hate for things once loved.

But also note, what David asks of the Lord here; he says "Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me." He doesn't say, don't take my wife from me. Or my kingdom. Or my riches. Or my fame. But rather "do not take your *Holy Spirit* from me".

That's a mark of how important he realised the Holy Spirit was in his life. That's how important He should be in ours too.

David then writes:

Psalm 51:12

Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

Do we struggle to maintain the joy of our Salvation? At times I think we all do. But how does that happen? David gives us the answer - by God's generous Spirit, His Holy Spirit. Indeed we read that the fruit of the Spirit *is* joy! If you want real joy in your life, seek it where it may be found - not in finances that will disappear into a bag with holes. Or a fleeting career. Or in entertainment which is so momentary.

Then your response will be as David's:

Psalm 51:13

Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.

That is, sharing the gospel is a natural outworking of our salvation, and of walking in the Spirit.

Indeed, Charles Spurgeon went as far to say that if you have no desire to see others saved, you are not saved yourself. And of course, we recently read what Paul wrote in Romans chapter 1:

Romans 1:16-17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

We then read of another natural response to our salvation in the next verse here in Psalm 51:

Psalm 51:14-15

Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, The God of my salvation, And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

So long as we have put our faith in Jesus as our Saviour, we are no longer guilty – we have been justified. Not through our efforts, but through Jesus death on the cross. And as such our response is to praise Him, whether in through song, through prayer, or through simply declaring with our voices *How marvellous! How wonderful! Is my Saviour's love for me!*

So wonderful, because our salvation is by grace, not by works. Of which David next says:

Psalm 51:16-17

For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise.

I'm reminded of what we read in 1 Samuel chapter 15, as Samuel rebuked King Saul:

1 Samuel 15:22

So Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.

God wants your obedience, not your lip service. And he wants my obedience – not merely for me to sing loudly on a Sunday morning. To obey Him, means we will want what He wants. And so David then says:

Psalm 51:18

Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem.

That is He wants God's will to be done. He wants His kingdom to come.

Psalm 51:19

Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, With burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.

That is, with a right and obedient heart, God will take pleasure in our offering. But since Jesus has paid the ultimate sacrifice for us by dying on the cross, once and for all, there is no longer any need for the temporary covering offered by sacrifices of animals — as we read in Hebrews, *it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins*. So rather, now we are to live our lives as a living sacrifice. We read in Romans 12:

Romans 12:1-2

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

We are to present our whole selves as a living sacrifice. That is our reasonable service. As the words of the old hymn say:

*When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

Conclusion

That is the glorious news of the gospel. That we may be forgiven of all our sin, and washed whiter than snow. How for evermore we should sing;

*How marvellous! How wonderful!
And my song shall ever be:
How marvellous! How wonderful!
Is my Saviour's love for me!*

Let us not treat His salvation with contempt. But let us seek with the same earnestness as David, that God would create a clean heart in us, that we would praise His name, and that our whole lives would honour and please Him as we live as a living sacrifice - not to earn our salvation, but in continual thanks and gratitude for it.

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