

Open to Psalm 51

- QUICK DISCLAIMER: My wife could go into labor at any moment!

Quick series looking at select Psalms in the Old Testament

- Before CD's, iTunes and Spotify...there were the Psalms
- The Psalms are a poetic playlist of ancient songs and hymns that speak to the highs and lows of the human experience, and how God reveals himself in all of them.
- Like all great songs, the Psalms are often both brutally honest and beautifully hopeful.
- And like all great songs, the Psalms don't just tell us about life, they draw us in.
- They beg us to insert ourselves into the tension between honesty and reverence, despair and delight, beauty and brokenness
- The Psalms are like a mirror...they don't just reveal things about the world, they reveal things about ourselves.
- And that is why they are such an integral part of our spiritual diet as believers.

This morning we will be looking at Psalm 51

- Reading & Teaching from NIV

PSALM 51 (NIV)

- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.
- ² Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.
- ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.
- ⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
- ⁶ Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.
- ⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
- ⁹ Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.
- ¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.

¹⁴ Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

¹⁵ Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise.

¹⁶ You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

¹⁷ My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

¹⁸ May it please you to prosper Zion, to build up the walls of Jerusalem.

¹⁹ Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous, in burnt offerings offered whole; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

PRAY

The news spread like wildfire throughout the nation...

- A political leader, a decorated military hero, a man of faith revered by almost everyone found himself embroiled in the most shocking and salacious of scandals.
- He neglected his duty, slept with the wife of one of his most trusted friends, got her pregnant, and then engaged in a cover up so nefarious that it ended in the gruesome murder of her husband and several others.
- And now, his failure was exposed.

It was the spring of '01. 1001 B.C. (that is) The Place: Jerusalem. The man: King David.

- Arguably Israel's greatest and most celebrated King...
- A man who was anointed and hand-picked by God to lead Israel to victory.
- had plunged himself straight into a monumental crisis that both shocked and shook the nation of Israel.
- You can imagine the murmurings and gossip traveling through the marketplaces and synagogues and neighborhoods. How would David respond?
- Would he flat-out deny his wrongdoing? For awhile, he did. Would he attempt somehow to spin this news to save face? Would he blame shift? What would David have to say for myself?

Psalm 51 is like David's press release...

- It is his statement-his public address to the nation in the face of his failure as a leader and as a man of God.
- And perhaps shockingly to us, in the end he doesn't do what we might expect from a leader experiencing a fall from grace.
- He doesn't sidestep the problem or offer some half-hearted statement of contrition. Nor does he diminish the severity of his actions, though he did for some time
- Instead, David pens a psalm. He writes and then publishes a song...
- ...a worship song that is both contrite and confident in equal measure.
- It's a hymn that begins with David's brutally honest perspective of his failure, and yet it concludes with David's beautifully hopeful perspective on his future. How can that be? And what does that mean for us?

Psalm 51 is not merely David's expression to God-it's also his lesson for us.

- A lesson not meant for kings and leaders, but for every single one of us.
- It's David's warning that if the king can fall, then it can happen to you too.

Because while our sin might not be adultery or murder, we all fail.

- All of us fall short.
- The question of Psalm 51 is that when (not if but when) we do fail, how do we respond? What do we do with our failure? Where do we go with it?
- And what I love about this Psalm is that it doesn't just pose the question to us, it also reveals to us the answer.
- Within David's poetic words we discover a way forward...
- A path that can lead us from failure to forgiveness, from ruin to redemption, and from depths of despair to the peak of God's redemptive promise.
- That is why Psalm 51 matters. What we learn from David can actually change your life.
- My hope is that as we look at this psalm in light of the Gospel (in light of Jesus), we, like David can be contrite and honest about our own failures, but also hopeful and confident about our future because of Jesus has done for us.
- The good news of Psalm 51 is that if King David could blow up his life so spectacularly and still be put back together, then so can we.

Psalm 51 helps us deal with our failure in three ways:

- I'm going to say them up front, because it's critical to understand them together. They're all connected.
- Psalm 51 helps us to:
 - Recognize the problem of guilt.
 - Embrace the process of repentance.
 - Walk in the promise of restoration.

1. Recognize the Problem of Guilt

David begins his psalm by acknowledging and confessing his failure.

- v1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.
- The very fact that he appeals to God's mercy reveals that he is acutely aware of his own guilt before God.
- His words here bear a resemblance to those of a defendant being sentenced. "May the court grant mercy."
- David recognizes that because of his failure he is completely at the mercy of his God. He is in a position of guilt. And if left to himself, this guilt is a problem that he cannot remove.

But guilt is tricky. Because all of us have experienced guilt in some way shape or form. And we all try to deal with the guilt in different ways.

- But how are we to understand guilt?
- And what do we do with guilt?
- What is the purpose of guilt?
- Is it purely an emotional construct? Is it just a feeling?
- Or is there something more real to it? Is guilt good, is it bad, or is it neutral?

These questions around guilt have been the subject of hundreds of books, thousands of dissertation papers, and millions of hours (and dollars) worth of therapy.

- And yet even the best efforts of our modern society have fallen short in our quest to free humanity from the problem of guilt.
- In fact, you could argue that the opposite is true!
- Our modern age has actually amplified the problem of guilt!
- Remember those ASPCA Commercials? You know the one...
 - Fade in: saddest looking Dog staring at the camera.
 - Then that Sarah McLaughlin song: "I will remember you"

What do we do with Failure?

- What are they doing? Appealing to your sense of guilt! They are manipulating your feeling of guilt in order to raise money.
- And it works! That one commercial is responsible for \$30million dollars worth of revenue for the ASPCA. All because of guilt!

In order to truly understand the problem of guilt (and what we do with it), we need to ask the question: What does scripture have to say about guilt?

- There's a (mis)perception that being a christian is basically walk around all the time feeling perpetually guilty in some regressive mental state.
- Maybe that's how you feel this morning. "Christianity is a guilt-fest"
- But the closer we look at the truth God's word, we discover that faith in God is actually the only way to effectively interpret and deal with Guilt. Why?

Because scripture actually gives us the whole picture of guilt.

- And it's two-fold:
- The Bible speaks about guilt in both objective and subjective language.
- In other words, scripture says that we can both *be* guilty and *feel* guilty. This is really important for us to get

In one sense, our guilt is objective.

- We might call this our standing of guilt.
- This is what modern psychology and self-help culture often fail to address, and it's the reason why they can't solve the problem of guilt.
- But the Bible argues that our guilt goes far beyond our feelings...
- ...that within the human nature there is something inherently broken—what we would call sin. There is something in our spiritual DNA that is rebellious by default.
- David describes this in verse 5:
- **v5-6 "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;"**
- He's recognizing that long before his failure, long before he betrayed his country, or his friend he was already guilty in the eyes of God.
- He had already fallen short of God's standard and there was nothing he could do to make up the difference.
- **If you struggle to believe that human beings are rebellious by nature, just have kids and by the time they hit two, you will understand exactly what David is getting at.**
- This is true of a 2 year old, a 22 year old, and even a 72 year old.

What do we do with Failure?

- Sin has rendered us legally, morally, and relationally guilty before God.
- And this kind of guilt is most certainly a problem, resulting in separation from God.

But in another sense our guilt is also subjective.

- We might call this the *feeling* of guilt or the *conviction* of guilt.
- David describes this well:
 - **v3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.**
- He's saying: "My sin is constantly on my mind. I can't get my failure out of my head. It's consuming me. It's eating me alive." He's describing the feeling of guilt.
- All of us have felt this at some point!
- When we do something that we know we shouldn't, or when we don't do something that we know we should. When we hurt someone with our words or our actions, if we cheat, if we lie, it affects us, we feel that guilt.
- We are aware of it.
- And what we do with that awareness (where we go with it) matters—
- For one, we need to know if our feelings of guilt are legitimate!
- Because sometimes we feel guilty when we are actually innocent!
- If you've ever been pulled over by the police...even if you did nothing wrong, you still feel guilty! As the cop is walking up to your window..."I must have done something wrong..."
- And other times we feel innocent when we are actually guilty.
- So how do we know? We look to God's word and his character.
- This is what David does! After he acknowledges his feeling of guilt he says:
 - **V4 ...you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.**
- He's weighing his feeling of guilt to God's standard of guilt.
- But also, we must recognize that our conviction of guilt also serves a purpose...

It's kind of like the check engine light on your car.

- Almost all of us have experienced this...
- You're a week out from your family road trip vacation to Yosemite that you've been planning for like three years...
- You've got your sprinter van all ready to go...
- And then right before you're about to leave, that annoying orange icon of doom pops up on your dashboard.
- And what is the first thing that you're tempted to do? IGNORE IT!

- "Maybe if I just don't think about the light, maybe if I just stop looking at the light, maybe if I don't acknowledge the light it will just go away by tomorrow.
- But then tomorrow comes and you get in your car and the light is still there.
- Then we start rationalizing: "well maybe it's not the engine, maybe it's just the light that's broken. Maybe it's just a fluke."
- But it doesn't go away.
- What is that light saying? "There's something in your engine that requires your attention. It needs to be looked at."

The conviction of guilt (our feeling of guilt) is a lot like that.

- It's an indicator—a signpost. A warning.
- It is meant to alert you to the fact that there is something underneath the hood of your heart that is not right, and it needs attention.
- There is something in your spiritual engine that is broken.

And if you treat your that conviction the same way that you treat your check engine light...your soul will break down.

- If you keep on ignoring your guilt as scripture reveals it, if you don't listen to the conviction on the spirit, guilt and sin will ultimately consume you and destroy you.
- It will destroy your marriage, your family, your relationships, your career...
- It will destroy your soul.s
- But the beauty of Psalm 51 is that it shows us how to deal with our guilt.

2. Embrace the Process of Repentance

Psalm 51 reveals to us that the bridge between the burden of guilt and the blessing of restoration is repentance.

- But what exactly is repentance?
- Much like guilt, repentance can be complicated to grasp at times...
- Is it remorse? Is it regret? Is it penance or atonement? Is there a hail mary involved? What does it mean to repent?
- The word itself simply means "Change of mind (direction)", but what does that mean when it comes to sin and guilt?

One of the beautiful things about Psalm 51 is that it really simplifies and demystifies the idea of repentance.

- This Psalm shows us that there are two main components to repentance (two sides of the repentance coin): Agreeing *with* God and Receiving *from* God.

First, repentance involves agreeing with God, specifically about our sin.

- Look at verse 4 again:
- **4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.**
- He's saying, "God I'm choosing to see my sin the way that You see it."
- This important for us to see
- Because if we're honest with ourselves, we often get this backward.
- Because often times we actually want God to agree with us.
- We want God to see our sin the way that we see it—not that big of a deal.
- But what David understood about sin, and what scripture reveals over and over again is that sin is a big deal in God's eyes...
- And the process of repentance requires that we see it the way that He does.

But repentance is not only about agreeing *with* God, it's also about receiving *from* God.

- What does David receive from God? Well, what does he ask for? He asks for forgiveness.
- Six different times throughout Psalm 51, David asks to be cleansed, which is a poetic picture of being forgiven.
- He says, "blot out my transgressions", "wash me", "cleanse me from my sin and my iniquity"

But then in verse 7 he goes into a little more detail:

- **v7 cleanse me with hyssop; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow."**
- That's an interesting detail! An easy one to miss.
- What is David getting at? Why is referencing hyssop? He's not just inserting some poetic, flowery language...
- In the Bible, the Hyssop plant is almost always used in conjunction with blood.
- In Exodus, it was used by the Israelites at passover to paint their door frames with the blood of lambs as a means of protection from God's wrath.
- In Leviticus, hyssop dipped in blood was used in the ceremonial cleansing of leprosy.

- In Hebrews 9 we learn that hyssop was used by Moses to cover the temple with blood as it was being dedicated.

So when David says, cleanse me with *hyssop*, He's saying "Lord, cleanse me with blood, and I will be forgiven."

- "My guilt and my sin are so great, the stain of my transgressions are so heavy that they can only be made clean by the blood of another."
- David would have likely been alluding to the animal sacrifices that were offered in the temple...
- But whether he realized it at the time or not, David is drawing our attention to another sacrifice to come that would be the ultimate sacrifice.

Because 1000 years after David penned this Psalm, Hyssop makes one more appearance in the Bible...

- As Jesus' poured out his blood on the hill of calvary, his close friends take a wine-soaked sponge, place it on a branch of hyssop, and offer it to him to ease his suffering.
- And it is at that precise moment, as he drinks that wine offered to him on that branch, that Jesus cries out those beautiful words that resound through the ages "Te telestai! It is finished!"
- And with those words, your guilt was dealt with, once and for all.
- By His stripes you are healed, and by his blood you have been forgiven.

To repent is to not only understand and confess the magnitude of your guilt before God, it is also to understand and receive the magnitude of God's forgiveness for you.

- Some of you need to hear that today.
- Some of you understand the weight your guilt...but you've forgotten the wonder of your forgiveness in Christ.
- That God loves you so extravagantly that He would pour out his own blood so that you, like David could be washed whiter than snow.
- That your debt could be forgiven once and for all.
- This is the essence of the Gospel, and it's the foundation for repentance:
- That in my sin I am fully guilty, and yet in Jesus I am fully free because of what he has done for me.
- That in my sin I am completely broken, and yet in Christ I am completely whole.

The thing about repentance is that it's not an isolated event. Repentance leads to something more. When we embrace the process of repentance...when we agree with God about our sin and receive His forgiveness of sin, we can then thirdly...

3. Walk in The Promise of Restoration

David begins to shift his perspective in verse 10...

- **10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.**
- 11 Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.**
- 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.**
- Notice, he's not longer asking for forgiveness *from* God, he is asking to be restored *by* God. Look at his language!
- Create! Renew! Restore!
- And what connects all of these things together?...the Spirit.
- When we are forgiven by God, we are promised a new and better Spirit!
- A Spirit that renews and regenerates us!
- A Spirit that breathes life into our dead bones!
- A Spirit that turns our weeping into rejoicing!
- A Spirit that makes beauty from our ashes!
- A spirit that restores.
- This what David *truly* needed! And it's what we need as well!

What David understood (and what we must understand) is that restoration is the fruit of forgiveness.

- Forgiveness is not the *ultimate* goal! Restoration is the ultimate goal! It's been the goal since the very first failure of Adam and Eve in the garden.
- And forgiveness is the means by which God to bring us to restoration.
- If God didn't want to restore us, he would have no need to forgive us.
- But in his love God so desires for us to be restored that he made provision for it.
- He did it for David in Psalm 51, and he does it for us by sending his Son to die on a cross that we could be made clean, and by giving us his Spirit so that we can be made brand new.
- So that we (like King David) can be fully restored and walk in that restoration.

And what does that look like? David describes it at the end of Psalm 51:

- As he turns his gaze from his heavy failure to his hopeful future, he begins to anticipate all of the benefits of His restoration!
- He describes boldness that comes when we are restored!
- **v13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.**
- He's saying: Lord let my life and my story be a testimony so that others can experience the same forgiveness and restoration that You have given to me.
- That is what the spirit does in us! It gives us boldness! We are no longer weighed down by the heaviness of our guilt and therefore we can be bold to tell others of how God has restored us!
- He also describes the act of singing and praising God!
- **v14-15 ¹⁴Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed...and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. ¹⁵ Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise.**
- David is so in awe and wonder of God's faithfulness to deliver and restore Him, he says: "If you open my mouth, worship is just going to start coming out. That's how good you are God! That I cannot help but give You glory for what you've done!"
- Galatians 4:6 For those who are in Christ we have been given a spirit that causes us to cry out "abba! Father!"
- When we realize the full beauty of our restoration, we cannot help but proclaim it!
- And then finally he speaks about gratitude.
- **v16-17 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.**
- What is David talking about?
- On this verse, Charles Spurgeon says **"The deeper the sense of sin, and the truer the sorrow for it, the more heartfelt also will be the thankfulness for pardon and reconciliation. The tender, humble, broken heart, is therefore the best thank offering."** -Charles Spurgeon
- When you realize that you have been forgiven a debt you could never pay, and are in the process of being restored to a glory beyond what you deserve or could possibly imagine by the grace of God, the only natural response is gratitude "I willingly and gladly offer myself to you in response for all you have done for me!"

- See, to be a Christian is not to walk around all the time with guilt. Its actually to live in utter gratitude because your guilt has been removed and you are free.

The hope of Psalm 51 is so beautiful. And it's an echo of the hope of the Gospel. It reminds us...

- That there is no failure so great that it can't be forgiven...
- There is no stain so dark that it can't be washed whiter than snow...
- There is no person so broken that they can't be put back together.
- No one has blown up their life so bad, that God can't restore it.
- That's good news! And some of you need to hear that today.
- You've been sitting underneath your failure and guilt for months or even years, and it is crushing you.
- And you need to hear today that the power of the cross and the forgiveness found in Jesus' blood is strong enough to lift that burden from your shoulders.

But Psalm 51 is a warning for us as well. It warns us that...

- That there is no one so great that they don't need to be forgiven
- That there is no self-righteous deed that will ever be strong enough to remove the burden of guilt from your shoulders.
- And there are some of you who need to heed this warning from Psalm 51.
- Because you think that if you just perform well enough...
- if you just make the right decisions...
- if you just say the right things...
- Or support the right causes on social media...
- If you're a good enough husband or wife...
- If you're a good enough parent...
- Or a good enough friend...
- If you are good enough then somehow it will balance out your guilt.
- I'm to tell you today, that is simply not true, nor is it possible.
- Your good can not and will never be able to remove your guilt.
- It didn't work for David, and it won't work for you.
- And this morning you need to hear that it is *only* through the power of the cross that you can be forgiven and free of your guilt. And it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that you can be renewed and restored.

No matter what side of that coin you find yourself on today, the Good news for you is that forgiveness *is available...*and restoration is *possible*

- You know, David did a lot of bad things around Psalm 51.
- He lied, he cheated, he stole and even killed.
- But there's one thing that we don't see David do in Psalm 51...
- David never doubts for one second God's ability to completely restore him.
- He is fully confident that God is able to cleanse him of his sin, remove the burden of his guilt, and restore the joy of his salvation.
- As we look to the cross, we can have that same confidence.
- We too can have that same assurance that though our sins were as scarlet, by Jesus' blood we are washed whiter than snow and that by his spirit we are made brand new.
- We are fully restored.