

From the Pulpit of Keith Miller
Meadowbrooke Church
June 16, 2019

Longing for Mercy in Light of a Forever Kingdom Psalm 51

Introduction

When King David penned his song (Psalm 51), he was keenly aware of his own sins, but his response to his sins was not to *get along with them*, but to take them to the only One who was capable of dealing with them... the God, who his sins offended. What inspired David to write this particular psalm was that he had experienced God's mercy and grace after he had committed adultery and murder.

David was the king of Israel for most of his life. For nearly all of his life, he was also a musician who loved to write songs. Most of the Psalms that have been included in our Bible were written by David; many are songs of worship, some are reflections concerning disappointment and pain, and a few are prayers of a deeply remorseful man over his sins. The psalm discussed in this sermon is one of two that are believed to have been written after David's most serious moral failure – adultery.

One of David's loyal soldiers was a man named Uriah, who loved his nation and his king. Uriah was married to a very beautiful woman by the name of Bathsheba. In 2 Samuel, verse 11, we are told that in the season David's army was in battle, he was at home when he should have been on the front lines with his men. Then David made a choice that changed his life forever:

It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her (in other words... he had sex with her). (2 Sam. 11:2-4)

Not long after his affair with Uriah's wife, she sent word back to David that she was pregnant with his child. David never saw this coming. So, like any other hypocrite trying to cover up his sin, David developed an elaborate plan to make sure nobody ever found out about his act of adultery. He brought Uriah home from the battlefield and did everything he could to get Uriah to have sex with his wife so that everybody would think the child belonged to Uriah, but nothing he did could convince him to sleep with his wife while his fellow soldiers risked their lives on the battlefield.

Finally David felt as though he had no other choice, so he wrote a letter and gave it to Uriah to deliver to Joab, the captain of his army. The letter read: "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die" (2 Sam. 11:14-15). David asked Uriah to hand deliver the letter that ordered his death written by David's own pen to

cover up his adulterous affair with Bathsheba. He succeeded... for a time. After Uriah was killed, I am sure David felt a great sense of relief that his sin would never go public. We are not told how long David was able to hide from his sin, but it was no longer than 9 months because we are told that the child he fathered died soon after birth. David hid from his sin, but he forgot that there was One who saw David's actions firsthand. God saw David's sin and exposed it through His prophet, Nathan. God sent Nathan to confront the king concerning his sin; David's response was simple: "I have sinned against the Lord."

After his sin was exposed for what it was, David didn't sugarcoat his sins, but acknowledged them for what they were. I want to look at five things David did in response to his sin that I believe will help you address your sins.

David Returned to God (vv. 1-2)

David did not go to see a physiologist or a counselor to understand the motive behind committing adultery and murder. Instead, the first thing he did after he acknowledged his sin, was return to God. The act of sinning is always the act of turning away from God. When David sinned, he sinned against God and his law. Cornelius Plantinga defines sin the following way:

Sin is faithlessness, lawlessness, godlessness. Sin is both the overstepping of a line and the failure to reach it – both transgression and shortcoming. Sin is a missing of the mark, a spoiling of goods, a staining of garments, a hitch in one's gait, a wandering from the path, a fragmenting of the whole. Sin is what culpably disturbs shalom. Sinful human life is a caricature of proper human life.¹

David returned to God by pleading for mercy. Mercy is the refraining from giving a person what he or she deserves. David returned to God by throwing himself upon His mercy. David did not go to God with his own righteousness, but the self-realization that his biggest problem was not a pretty woman naked on a roof, but himself. David realized that the only remedy was the mercy of a loving God. "**Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!**"

David Realized the Nature of His Sin (vv. 3-6)

The second thing David did was realize that his sin was first and foremost against God: "**Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...**" (v. 4). Did David sin against Bathsheba? Yes. Did David sin against Uriah? Yes. Did David sin against the people of his kingdom? Yes. However, sin is first and foremost an offense to the God who made you and those around you in His image. Sin, at its core, is the exchanging of God for something or someone that you believe can satisfy more than God.

Sin is deeper than misbehaving. Sin is more profound than just bad actions. Sin is more violent than cutting words. Sin is the desire to be God rather than bow to God. This is why David confesses, "**Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...**" However, the question must be answered: Where did his sin come from? What was the source of his adultery and murder? The answer is found in verse 5, "**Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.**" David's problem was his heart, and not

¹ Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; 1995), p. 88.

anyone else; not the devil, not a naked woman, not loneliness, not an unsatisfied sex life, not poor communication with his spouse, and not even his childhood. The source of David's sin was his own heart.

David Sought to be Reconciled with God (vv. 7-12)

The third thing David did with his sin after returning to God and realizing the nature of it, was seek reconciliation with God. Sin always ruins fellowship with God, first and foremost, and it is because of our sin that we need to be reconciled to God. When Israel was under the bondage of slavery in Egypt, as God prepared to inflict the Egyptians with one final plague, God instructed all of the Hebrews to, **“Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin”** (Exod. 12:22). The blood of a perfect lamb was slaughtered to provide the blood that would cover the door posts and lintel so that the sin of every member of that home would be atoned for so that when the angel of death came it would pass over the home. However, every home unmarked by the blood of a perfect lamb would suffer the death of every firstborn son in the home.

Hyssop is a shrub with stiff, hairy leaves and branches that held liquid well. It was not only used to mark the homes of the Hebrew people on the first Passover, but it was also used in purification ceremonies throughout Israel's history. When David begged God to purge him with hyssop, he prayed for God to cleanse him so that he could be, **“Whiter than snow.”** David understood that no shrub was going to cleanse him from his sin, except the atoning love of God. Paul David Tripp, in his book, *Whiter than Snow*, writes the following about sin:

Because sin is about the breaking of relationship, restoration of relationship is the only hope for us in our struggle with sin. It's only because God is willing to love us in a way that we refuse to love him that we have any hope of defeating sin. It's through the gift of adoption into relationship with him that we find what we need to gain power over sin. And what do we need? A greater love for him than we have for ourselves. His love for us is the only thing that has the power to produce in us that kind of love for him.

David knew that the only way to be reconciled to the God he sinned against was to seek God's forgiveness. David could do nothing about his heart problem other than trust in the mercy of a God who alone was able to “blot out his sin, give him a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within him” (v. 10). According to verse 12, for David to be reconciled to God, he needed a salvation that only God could provide.

David was Ruined by His Sin (vv. 13-17)

The fourth thing David did in responding to his sin was recognize it had ruined him. The problem with the human heart is that it is an idol factory. In dealing with your sin, you must come to terms with the reality that only God can satisfy your thirsty soul. God does not want your buckets of service, but only your thirst for Him. David tasted the polluted water of his lust, pride, and greed and was left thirsty and sick. In these verses we learn of David's thirst for God. His only hope of truly living was not in the fleeting pleasure of a night with another man's wife, but the satisfaction of God: **“For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will**

not be pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (vv. 16-17).

David did not completely understand that he was longing, according to verses 16-17, for the Perfect Lamb of God. David was not praying for a thing or a religious system; David was praying for a Person. David was praying for the central figure and promise of all of Scripture as the remedy of his sin and the hope of his salvation:

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5:18–21)

David longed for the promise of what the Passover pointed too; David longed for the Lamb of God that John the Baptist pointed too: **“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29)!**

David Recognized that His Sin was Costly (vv. 18-19)

After David confessed his sin, God declared: **“The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die” (2 Sam. 12:13).** How is it that God was able to remain perfectly holy and just and still forgive David of adultery, lying, and murder? He was able to forgive because of what His Son would do hundreds of years later on a Roman Cross in David’s place. As He hung on the cross in our place, Jesus took upon Himself David’s adultery, deception, and murder just as much as He took on your sins and mine. **“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins” (Romans 3:23-26).**

However, as we see in the final two verses of David’s prayer, there was a cost to his sin and he knew it. This is why he prayed: **“Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem...”** Even after God assured David that his sin was **“put away,”** He also warned that the consequences of his sin would affect his family and his kingdom. After David’s sin, his son, Amnon raped his sister, Tamar, then Absalom (David’s other son) killed Amnon and eventually drove his father out of his own kingdom. Needless to say, there were dire consequences to David’s sin even though he repented and was restored back to a right relationship with God.

Application

Sin is first and foremost against God, but it ruins, disrupts, and sometimes destroys the peace of all those around you. Sin always demands more than you can pay and promises what it cannot deliver. This is what David learned the hard way.

We learn five things learn from David's sin and Psalm 51 that will help us win the war against your own flesh and sin:

1. **Return** to God. The first thing we must do once we sin is turn to God. How does one turn to God? By turning to Jesus who lived the life you could never live for the purpose of dying a death under the wrath of God we all deserved. The Bible tells us we can turn to God: "**To him [Jesus] all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his [Jesus'] name**" (Acts 10:43). The Bible also promises, "**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness**" (1 John 1:9). If you are not a Christian, your first and greatest need is to believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; if you are a Christian, you need to do exactly what 1 John 1:9 tells us to do: Run to Jesus in repentance.
2. **Realize** the nature of your sin as first an offence to God (Col. 3:5-11). Before sin is ever an offence to those in your life that it has affected, you need to realize that it is first and foremost an offense to God. If you ever want to see just how ugly your sin really is, and how seriously God takes your sin, consider the cross of Jesus Christ and read Isaiah 53, which is an explanation of what it was that Jesus actually suffered on the cross.
3. **Resolve** that Sin affects your relationship with God, and that you need to be restored to Him (Hebrews 6:4-6). People go to hell because of sin, and it is a place the Isaiah 66:24 describes in the following way: "**And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.**" Jesus also described hell as a fiery furnace where, "**there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth**" (Matt. 13:36-43). Jesus suffered the wrath of God because of your sin.
4. **Respond** to the grief of God over your sin: "**And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption**" (Eph. 4:30). Sin grieves the heart of God; we need to respond in sorrow to God over our sin just as David did. Every time a Christian sins deliberately, it is as if we are crucifying Jesus all over again just as Hebrews 6:1-4 describes: "**...they are crucifying one again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.**" Our sin should break our hearts as it does the heart of God.
5. **Recognize** that sin is costly. Sin will always promise what it cannot deliver and cost you more than you can pay. Every time you are tempted to sin, remember the cost of sin, but also remember the infinite love of a holy God who sent his Son to endure his wrath over your sin in your place and because of that, we are assured: "**There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**" (Rom. 8:1).

Finally, I leave you with an encouraging word for C.H. Spurgeon: "There is no form of sinfulness to which you are addicted, which Christ cannot remove."