

Wash Me

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Bible Text: Psalm 51
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There are many reasons to love the Bible, the 66 books of the Bible. There are many reasons to love God's word. One of the many reasons, in my opinion, to love God's word is because it deals with reality. It tells us the way things really are rather than flattering us and telling us that we are good people by nature, it deals with the reality of sin and James, for example, says that we all stumble in many ways; and so the Bible confronts us with our sin and gives us a means to deal with it and yet it tells us that we stumble in many many ways. In the passage that I read earlier from 2 Samuel 12, we saw God confronting David with the reality of his sin with Bathsheba and also with the murder of Uriah. Those are very flagrant sins that are easy to recognize. But let me remind you as we come to Psalm 51, of Psalm 50 which we studied just two weeks ago, to realize that there are multiple ways that the Lord addresses us and convicts us of sin. In Psalm 50, the Lord called his people to repent of their insincere worship. He convicted them of external formality, just going through the motions when they came to be before him and to present their sacrifices. He convicted them of life hypocrisy, in one sense, gave a head fake to Scripture. They were actually rejecting God's instruction and living life in a very sinful way and so Psalm 50 ends on a rather poignant, a very strong call to repentance without a complete resolution of the issue that it raises. Well, it's very interesting that as you just read consecutively through the Psalter, to find Psalm 51 right as the next text that a Jew would read as he goes through the Psalter after seeing the call to repentance.

Look at Psalm 50:22 just to remind you of this, I don't think that commentators have given quite enough attention to the connection between Psalm 50 and Psalm 51, there are a few that do, but Psalm 50 ends on a strong call to repentance. And in verse 22, the Scripture says, "Now consider this, you who forget God, Or I will tear you in pieces, and there will be none to deliver. He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me; And to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God." There is a crossroads, there is a fork in the road that says, "Choose which way you are going to go," at the end of Psalm 50. Then as you turn to Psalm 51, you have this very familiar Psalm of confession and of repentance and so Psalm 51, in a sense, serves in the broader context of the Psalter as an illustration of what true repentance looks like. In other words, if you read Psalm 50 and you were convicted by what it said and said, "Now what do I do?" Psalm 51 would answer that spiritual question for you and say, "You need to move forward in this manner as is illustrated for you here." So that's kind of the broader context

of Psalm 51 that adds to our understanding as we have already seen the historical context that gave rise to this Psalm from the life of David.

So let's read Psalm 51. There is a lot of Scripture reading going on tonight. I think that's a good thing. I hope you agree. Psalm 51, let's read the whole text and go through it and then we'll come back and expound it for all too brief of a time. Psalm 51, the inscription says that it is, "A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." Verse 1, now we see, having seen that David said in 2 Samuel 12, "I have sinned against the LORD," Psalm 51 fleshes that out and gives us a sense of what went on in David's heart after that confrontation. Verse 1 says,

1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my
transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me
from my sin. 3 For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before
me. 4 Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your
sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You
judge. 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother
conceived me. 6 Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in
the hidden part You will make me know wisdom. 7 Purify me with
hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8
Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken
rejoice. 9 Hide Your face from my sins And blot out all my iniquities. 10
Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
11 Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy
Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me
with a willing spirit. 13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And
sinners will be converted to You. 14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O
God, the God of my salvation; Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your
righteousness. 15 O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your
praise. 16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;
You are not pleased with burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a
broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.
18 By Your favor do good to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem. 19 Then
You will delight in righteous sacrifices, In burnt offering and whole burnt
offering; Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.

The wonder of Psalm 51 is this, is that in the magnitude of the sin that David committed, he nevertheless still found grace in his sin. He found forgiveness. He found God ready to grant him mercy when he approached him in a spirit of repentance. The wonderful thing for all of you here this evening, and those of you watching over the live stream, is that if you come here tonight with sin bearing down on your conscience, the guilt and the weight of unconfessed sin and you feel the weight of that on your heart, the promise of Scripture is that you can find grace too; that as we come to God with a broken and a contrite heart, that he receives us in mercy. He doesn't scold us. He doesn't rebuke us when we come. He's ready to show his loyal love once more, ready to show his grace and

mercy upon you. And I don't know about you, but that sounds pretty good to me this evening, to be able to come to God with a sense that he is willing to receive sinners in a favorable sense when they come to him in the spirit outlined in this Psalm.

And what we have here in Psalm 51 is perhaps arguably the greatest and the most detailed roadmap that a spirit of confession should take. And as we said this past Sunday as we were talking about Matthew 5:4, we realize that the biblical picture of confession is not simply acknowledging the sin that you've committed. Oh, that's true enough and that's a central element of true confession, of agreeing with God over the sin that you have committed. Yes, that is central to it but what we see here in Psalm 51, what we talked about Sunday from Matthew 5:4, is that true confession moves beyond that as well and it turns and puts its trust in the saving and the sanctifying and the forgiving mercy of God, and it is only when a sinner has come to not only confess and express sorrow over his sin but to humbly turn his trust over to the mercy of God, that biblical confession has actually taken place. So no one should flatter themselves in thinking that they are deeply sorrowful over their sin if that sorrow doesn't motivate them and turn them to Christ as well. It's not enough simply to bewail how bad a person you are; there are lots of false religions that would slash themselves and do different things in supposed means of penitence but never actually trust Christ. What you want to do as a Christian, what you need to do as a sinner, is to recognize your sin in such a way that it moves you beyond that to put your trust in Christ and in the shed blood that is offered for the forgiveness of sin.

So that's kind of what we see. We want to see the full orb'd confession that brings somebody not only from stating that he has sinned but resting in the remedy that God has provided for sinners and that's what we're going to see as we go through four basic points here this evening to take us through Psalm 51. So let's dive into this Psalm which is a wonderful hope and a wonderful comfort for us here this evening. You know, I can't tell you what's going to happen with the election, in one sense I really don't care about the election and I'm never going to try to tell you how to vote or do any of that stuff; you can deal with that political stuff as you wish and according to the dictates of your own conscience. We have something far more important to talk about here tonight. I have something far more strategic to share with you here this evening and that is how you can have the stain of sin cleansed from your soul, and that's what we have the privilege of looking at here this evening.

So what does David do? We see, first of all, that he offers a prayer of confession. He offers a prayer of confession, and we're going to see this in the first nine verses of Psalm 51. First of all, you see him making a confession of his actual acts of sin, a-c-t-s, not a-x-e. That would be something really different. A confession of his actual acts of sin, and as we start, I want you to see, those of you especially that have been with us on Sundays, I want you to see the marvelous way that Scripture integrates with itself and how the Old Testament testimony about these spiritual realities is in perfect conformity with what we have seen Jesus teaching us at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6 and 7. We have said in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus is establishing the principle

that the kingdom of God operates on a principle of grace, not merit, and that's what we see David resting in as he opens his prayer here in Psalm 51, in the very first verse.

Look at it with me. He says,

1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my
transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me
from my sin. 3 For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before
me.

Notice what he's doing right from the very beginning, notice that the ground upon which he approaches God after his mammoth year of sin, as he approaches God solely on the principle of grace, he appeals to God's compassion; he appeals to God's loyal love for his people and he says, "God, I appeal to who you are. I appeal to your attributes of mercy and kindness and the pity that you have on sinners as the sole basis upon which I ask you to hear my prayer." There is no other grounds upon which God can be approached. You all individually and collectively, you all have sinned in too many ways. You have stumbled in too many ways. You have broken God's law. You have not loved him as you should. You have not obeyed him in his positive commands. You have not done the things that he said you should do, you have done things and thought things and said things that he said you ought not to have done. Your righteousness is like a window that has had a rock thrown through it; it is shattered and there is nothing that can be done to put it back together. So that means that the only principle upon which we could approach God would be if he would have undeserved favor and kindness toward us. That is essential for us to understand and we ever live under that principle of grace. We rely on it and we never shift over into a sense of pride and self-righteousness. We're always resting in the compassion and the loyal love of God as our only hope of approaching him.

So what David says here and as he bases his appeal on the compassion and the greatness of the lovingkindness of God, is he is acknowledging from the very start that there is no justification for his sin. There is no excuse for him and so he appeals to divine love and undeserved favor for God to receive him. It would be like a child who has been naughty and goes to his parent, he has to appeal to the parent's love for a reconciled relationship because his disobedience has placed him in a position of needing discipline. Well, David is approaching God in a much greater sense than that and appealing to the character of God alone as the basis upon which God would receive him. Now, that's where confession starts, in other words. As you are confessing sin, even as a believer, you are mindful that, "The reason that I can come to God like this is not because he owes me anything but it's because who he is," and that remembering that principle, that attribute of compassion in the character of God, gives you a sense of confidence that he will receive you even though you don't deserve that. So confession starts as everything else does in the Christian life, somehow centered on the character of God, and that's where David begins.

Now, as you move on, you see that there are three phrases that kind of frame David's request for forgiveness. Look at the end of verse 1 with me and you'll see that he uses

three words to signify forgiveness and three words to signify sin in what we're about to see. He says at the end of verse 1, "blot out my transgressions." Verse 2, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity. Cleanse me from my sin." So he says, "Blot it out. Wash me and cleanse me." So just to kind of take a quick look at those, when David says "blot out my transgressions," he's speaking in a way that is a picture of asking God to remove the charges that are on the book against him. "God, I realize that there are charges against me that are written in the book, as it were. There are debits on my side of the ledger. God, I'm asking you to erase those. I'm asking you to take those off the books so that they would not be held against me in your divine court. I have violated the lines of divine authority, I have sinned against your word, I have sinned against your character, I have sinned against the privilege of being king to your people, O God, what can I say except to ask you to remove that which by justice you could hold against me?"

He says, "Wash me from my iniquity." He's using a different word picture here now that kind of pictures a laundry man who is using soap and vigorous rubbing in order to cleanse a garment; to soap and rinse a soiled garment to get it clean. David says, "Lord, I am that soiled garment. I'm dirty inside. I'm not clean before you. There is guilt attached to my soul. Indeed, Lord, my soul is perverse. It is out of alignment and, God, I need inner cleansing." You know what that's like, don't you? You know what it's like to have a guilty conscience when you know that you have sinned against God and there is no denying it? If you're a Christian, you know something about that, anyway. And you come and you just have that sense of your energy being dissipated and the weight of a black cloud hanging on you and say, "Not only have I not done right, I have not made this right with the Lord." And you feel the weight of that in your heart. Well, David felt that and he says that the divine work that he needs is like a cleansing of a garment so that the stain that is on his soul would be removed. "God, I have a debt against you. Please blot it out. God, I'm dirty before you. Please cleanse me." Do you see the different word pictures he is using?

And this kind of goes to what I was saying on Sunday also. For those of you that weren't with us on Sunday, I apologize for the multiplied references to my Sunday message, but it's available out there on the table if you want to pick it up. Is to realize, you know, we said on Sunday and I'm just so grateful for all of you that come so faithfully Sunday and Tuesday because when we talk like this and when these messages start to build on one another, we can really make some spiritual progress together. We really have an opportunity when God's word is reinforcing itself from different perspectives, even from both of the testaments to be able to see things like this together. What we said on Sunday was talking about the sincerity of our confession. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn," and we asked the question: when was the last time that you confessed any sin? And how long did it take you to do it? Was it five seconds? Was it maybe 15 or 30? And you start to realize the superficial way that we have been conditioned to deal with sin, that we think it's a fairly light matter as shown by the way that we pray about it when we do sin. "Oh, Lord, please forgive me and now let's move on to what I have to ask you for here today."

Well, this is not the picture that David gives to us, is it? David dwells on what he wants God to do. "God, blot it out. God, cleanse me." And it goes on there in verse 2, he says, "God, wash me thoroughly from my iniquity," and there at the end of verse 2, look at it with me, he says, "cleanse me from my sin." He's saying, "God, I need purity to approach you for worship. I have fallen short of your holiness." So taken together, these three requests are saying, "God, I need you to drop the charges that are rightly against me. Blot them out. God, my soul is dirty. Wash it, please, and cleanse it, that I would be rid of this stain on my soul. Make me fit for worship once again." And all I'm pointing out by comparing this with what we talked about on Sunday, is the fact that this wasn't something that David rushed through in his prayer; that David stopped and took the condition of his soul seriously. He realized that his life of sin over the prior year was a great violation of the holiness of God, and that because of God's great holiness, because of God's great compassion, his great authority, his great love, his mercy on his people, to sin against that was an inexcusable act of treason in such a way that it shouldn't be dealt with superficially. So these multiplied references emphasize the totality of restoration that he was seeking. "God, there are just so many different ways to express it. I lay it all before you and ask you to have mercy on me because I am defiled and I need to be cleansed."

And how much did David see? What was David's perspective on his sin? It's stunning when you realize and remember the historical context of it. Here he has committed adultery with a woman and used his kingly authority to bring her into his bedroom, as it were, and then he used his authority to have her husband assassinated when he didn't go along with David's attempt in the cover-up. This is really serious. People's lives were greatly affected by what had happened and yet what is David's perspective as he is confessing his sin?

Look at verse 4 in this prayer of confession as it goes on. David says,

4 Against You, You only, I have sinned
And done what is evil in Your sight,

David is so theocentric, he is so God-centered in his confession, his attention and his mind is so exclusively devoted to the God to whom he is praying that it's like there's no one else in the room; that in comparison to the vertical violation of the holiness of God, that nothing else matters by comparison. It's not that he is denying that there were human consequences, it's not denying that there were human effects, but by comparison, the sin against God was so far greater that that's the exclusive focus of his prayer. That's how much the holiness of God mattered to him. That's how much he yearned for reconciliation with God that, "God, when I think about this in your presence, nothing else matters by comparison. This is just about you and me." Beloved, has your heart ever yearned after God like that? Do you love God like that? That when it comes time to confess sin, that you're just so caught up with the spiritual realities as they are vertically toward God, that really nothing else matters? It's not about your reputation. It's not about the consequences to you or to others. "God, I need to deal with you before I do with anyone else." That's

the spirit of true confession that David teaches us here and so any consequences that God would bring upon him would be righteous and just.

Look at what David says there in verse 4. Notice the complete self-abandonment of what David does here. He doesn't plead against the consequences that Nathan warned him would come in the passage that we read in 2 Samuel 12, David simply says, "I have sinned in such a way,

that You are justified when You speak
And blameless when You judge.

"God, whatever you would do with me, the way I have sinned against you would be right. You would be justified. If there were anyone that could take you to account, God, and there is not, but even if there were, God, you would be justified, vindicated, declared righteous in any way that you would deal with me. I prostrate myself before you. I bow low before you in complete and utter submission and humility. I accept whatever you have for me as a result." This sets the bar pretty high for us, doesn't it? Do you see the kind of spiritual mourning that we spoke about on Sunday being fleshed out in what David says here in Psalm 51? And I just ask you and encourage you and invite you, as it were, to this kind of perspective with your God. "God, I'm not asking you to spare me any consequences for my sin. I just place myself entirely in your hands. According to your mercy, cleanse me and whatever comes from that, Father, I accept. What else could I do, God? I forfeited all my rights of claims on you with my sin."

David is thoroughly resigned before God and yet, do you know what? He goes further. The depth of this confession is quite remarkable. It leads us into realms of theology, realms of spiritual thought, of biblical realities that we all need to take to heart, and that hopefully in our systematic theology courses on Saturdays, the first Saturdays of every month, we'll be able to dig into more closely in days to come. What I want you to see here this evening is the personal way, the personal examination that David makes of his own soul. You see, we all, and I'm guilty of this as well, you know, we tend to stop at confessing the acts that come to our mind. You know, you lose your temper or you've done something and you confess that act and you confess that and you stop there. Okay, it's good to confess in that way but what I want you to see is that David goes further. He's thinking more deeply about his sin, and the question when you sin is always this, it always transcends the individual act or word or thought that you're confessing; there is another realm to go to when you are confessing sin, another way that you need to think about it that goes deeper than what we usually do. You see, do you know why you sin? Do you know why that happens? It is because you have a sinful nature. You have a disposition that is prone towards sin. If you are not a Christian, that is the dominating principle of your entire life. You are disposed towards sin and the acts of sin simply are flowing out of your unregenerate heart. Yet even as a Christian, there is still a remnant of sin, there is a principle of sin. The Apostle Paul could say, "I find that there is a principle of evil that is within me," Romans 7, "the one who wishes to do good, the good that I want, I don't do, the bad that I don't want, I do. What's wrong with me?" Paul goes deeper and says, "There is a principle of the evil that is in my heart."

Well, what David is doing as we progress through this Psalm, is he's going to that and he's confessing the twisted nature, the distorted disposition that he has. Look at verses 5 and 6 and see where he goes with this. He goes deeply to his inner man. He's not content to simply leave it at a superficial level. So David not only confesses his acts of sin, he confesses the fact that he has a sinful nature. Look at verse 5,

5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. 6 Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom. 7 Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

What is he saying here? He says, "Lord, the reason that I sinned like this is that sin has been attached to my nature from the moment of my conception. My mother transmitted sin to me. There was a sinful seed in me at the moment of my conception and what the sins that I have committed now can be traced all the way back to that deep root, O God." He's not saying that his mother committed immorality when she conceived him, rather he's saying, "I have been a sinner from the start. Lord, that's the problem. I'm twisted inside. I've never been righteous. I've never been right. I have always been prone to evil." In the words of the hymn that we sung at the beginning of the evening, "Lord, I'm prone to wander and I feel it." And that's what David is expressing here. He's saying, "The problem, God, is this," and this is the problem that we all have to deal with, the reason that you sin is that you have a heart, your inner man is inclined in that direction. That was the root of the problem and as a Christian, it's that which we have to put to death. We have to mortify that inclination to sin again and again and again as part of the sanctification process; that we fight a battle against that; that we rely on the Spirit and that we make effort against sin rather than letting that disposition lead us away from the God that saved us. The point here for this evening is that David made the connection that, "This sin that I have committed occurred in a spiritual context of a twisted nature that is within me and, God, I confess that before you."

So, my friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, if you seriously want to grow spiritually, you truly desire after the holiness of God, you truly want to put sin to death, you have to come to grips with that reality, that there is evil, there is a principle of sin still within you that you must put to death. Your inner man has not been made perfect. You've been regenerated, God has given you a new nature, you have been born again, yes, yes, yes, but it's not a principle of perfection. That still waits for when you will be in heaven. In the meantime, your worst enemy is found within your own heart and you know that by experience if you have thought about it at all. That nature, that disposition, that principle of evil is why you sin. So David takes it a step further and says, "God, I need your help because this is," stated differently, a different metaphor, "this is deeply rooted in me. This came from deep inside me, O God, it wasn't just a passing mistake." So David says and he emphasizes this as he says there in verse 6, you can see how he goes to his innermost being. Verse 6, "God, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom." What is he saying except that, "I have lacked that inside me and so, God, I need your help to deal with that inner problem that I am facing."

Look at verses 7 and 8 with me again, "God, purify me with hyssop." We're going to talk about this for a little bit.

7 Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8 Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.

And of course, literal bones weren't literally broken but the weight that he was feeling in his state of unconfessed sin was pressing upon him in a heavy weight upon him.

What is he saying when he says, "Purify me with hyssop"? You know, I'm pretty sure that none of us, apart from Psalm 51, it would never occur to any of us to pray those exact words. I know it has never occurred to me. "God, do you know what I really need you to do is purify me with hyssop." What does that mean? It must have meant something to David. Well, Scripture helps us here in a way that is going to lead us straight to the cross, is where this is going. Hyssop was a kind of plant. It was a multi-stemmed plant that had what they describe as hairy leaves. It had an absorbent quality toward it that made it function a little bit – this is a weak analogy – but a little bit like a paintbrush, you might say. You know, there is an absorbency in a good paintbrush and you can dip it in and then you can flip it and things will splatter out as you do that. Well, hyssop was a plant that was like that. It would be tied in branches and used like a brush. Stay with me here with where this is going. Do you know that in Exodus 12, before the exodus, you know how the Israelites were supposed to apply blood to the door posts so that the angel of death would pass over their home? How did they apply that blood? With hyssop, Exodus 12:22. Did you know that when it came time to do a ceremonial cleansing of lepers and there would be blood of birds that they would use to ceremonially apply blood to them, do you know how they applied it? With hyssop, Leviticus 14:6.

Hyssop was connected to blood sacrifice and if you look over at the book of Hebrews 9, we're going to let the New Testament help us understand the Old Testament, Hebrews 9:19. Oh, is this good! Oh, is this helpful to understand what David is saying! Hebrews 9 gives us a perspective on the way that the whole law of Moses should be viewed, that which would have been informing what David was saying when he wrote Psalm 51. Hebrews 9:19, an inspired commentary on this matter says that, "when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you.' And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." What is that telling you? What is it saying to us here this evening? It's interpreting the law of Moses and saying cleansing happens by bloodshed; an innocent victim sheds blood and that is the basis upon which cleansing can come, and this is the principle that animates the law of Moses according to the New Testament expansion and understanding that it gives to us.

This is what was in David's mind when he said these things. Hyssop was clearly related to blood sacrifice and so when he says, "Purify me with hyssop," remembering what Hebrews 9 says that all things are cleansed with blood, David is saying, "God, cleanse my soul." And how is that soul going to be cleansed? It is going to be cleansed with bloodshed clearly referring to blood sacrifice. James Montgomery Boice says this and I quote, he said, "When David asked that God cleanse him with hyssop, he meant, 'Cleanse me by the blood. Forgive me and regard me as cleansed on the basis of the innocent victim that has died.'"

What David found in the Old Testament in a symbol, beloved, you and I find in our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:7 says, "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." And, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." It's about blood being shed. David recognizing that God had established a pattern of blood sacrifices that now we know were pointing forward to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross, David is saying, "God, I need blood applied to my soul." And when it comes to you dealing with your sin, beloved, we are saying the exact same thing that we said on Sunday, two days ago, that when you are mourning and confessing sin, the true mourning over sin is that which leads you to trust in Christ and in his shed blood on your behalf so that the conviction of guilt, the conviction of sin that comes upon you, you confess that and there comes a point where you pivot, as it were, your focus changes. "I have laid this out honestly to the Lord and now, O God, the blood that was shed for me is what I appeal to for the cleansing. I know that it is sufficient. I trust in your word when it says it cleanses me from sin." And that, beloved, is the answer to your accusing conscience. That is the only place where sinners find true relief is in the shed blood.

And David, go back to Psalm 51 now. You probably were wise enough to keep your finger in that part of the Bible. I was not and so I am turning to Psalm 51 as I speak. Here we go. And so David knew that with an acceptable blood sacrifice, he could be made clean; that God on the basis of shed blood could wash him and he would be whiter than snow. That picture of purity, that picture of cleansing, that picture of no stain, no blemish. And David wraps it up, as it were, saying, "Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken rejoice, O God." He kind of wraps it up and uses the same verbs that he was using earlier. That's how we know to tie this section together.

9 Hide Your face from my sins And blot out all my iniquities.

"Not just the ones with Bathsheba and Uriah, O God, wash them all away. Take it all away. Cleanse me so that my soul is right again." And again you hear the echo of this in the verse that I quoted earlier from 1 John 1:9, "When we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Do you realize the magnitude that you have in Christ? Do you realize the wonder of salvation, that God forgives not only the sins that you confess, he wipes them all away. What a wonderful place to be under the blood of Christ. What a wonderful Savior to

have. What a place for you to rest this evening despite that all of the wrong things that you have done, the ways that you have twisted life, to find that in Christ there is a complete, utter, full forgiveness that answers the holiness of God, and that there is as Paul said in Romans 8:1, "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

I realize we're not an amening church, and that's fine. I kind of prefer it that way, but there should be one big hallelujah rising up in your heart right now. "O Jesus, thank you! The greatness of what you have done and the greatness of your blood, as it were, splashed on me to cover me, to cleanse me, O Christ, I thank you from the bottom of my heart." Because, beloved, right here, right now, that's the rest for your soul.

Now, David as he moves on in this Psalm, moves on in the second part, the second section, second point if you're taking notes tonight, with a prayer for restoration. He has made a prayer of confession. He has dealt with sin thoroughly and now he moves forward and asks for restoration. Since David's nature had produced the sin, he needs a work within to keep him from returning to sin.

Look at verse 10 with me and notice the inward focus of it, and that's just what I would really have you take to heart, those of you that desire to be a sincere and noble Christian, to see the depth at which David deals with it. This is not superficial. This is not external. This is all about the inner man. And I know that some of you young people are well on a path toward developing holy desires, well, here you go. Here's how you extend those and develop those. In verse 10, David says,

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit.

Many commentators have noted that when David says, "Create in me a clean heart," it's the same Hebrew verb that is used in Genesis 1 to speak about God's creation of the heavens and the earth. He's asking God to use his creative power to instill in him something that is not there; to make something from outside take root on the inside. David is asking God, "God, inclined by your power, to incline my nature toward obedience, overcome this thing that is within me by your greater power to secure me in the desire for righteousness."

In two weeks, give or take, we'll be looking at Matthew 5:6. I can't tell you how grateful and happy I am to be in the Sermon on the Mount. I've been waiting five years for this. In Matthew 5:6, Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." What is David saying here? He is saying, "God, I'm hungry for righteousness. There is a spiritual yearning within me that I would live righteously; that I would follow after you and stop this sin and this disobedience. I don't want to go back in the slop of the pignen of my own sin. God, I want to be different. God, I want to live righteously. I want to please you instead of what I've been doing over this past year."

What's he doing except saying, "God, I hunger and thirst for righteousness." A thousand years later, David could have been sitting at the feet of Christ, his own son, his own descendant and said, "Yes, I understand exactly what you're talking about. That's what I was expressing in Psalm 51." He is desiring after steadfast loyalty toward God. The joy of his salvation, a willing spirit that is willing and compliant and submissive to God, that's what he wants.

Is that you want? Isn't that what you want? Maybe I can state it more positively than that. I know this is true of most of you in this room. That's what you want. What you have here in Psalm 51 is David's invitation to pray to God, "God, strengthen that and establish it still more in my life. Why? Because I hunger and thirst for righteousness. God, whatever is happening in this world around me, whatever else happens, whatever else comes upon me in my own personal life, O God, just help me live righteously. Help me live a life that is worthy of the Christ who died and saved me. Help me live in a manner that is worthy of the God who elected me before the foundation of the world. O God, help me live in a manner that is worthy of the Spirit that indwells me. God, I want that. God, help! Give it to me, O God!" It's the deep earnest longing of the redeemed heart.

Now, just a word about verse 11 which we'll treat all too briefly. David says, "Don't cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me." Notice, first of all, that obviously the Spirit is still somehow with him because otherwise God couldn't take him if he was already gone. But what David is alluding to here is not the Spirit in the way, I believe, not in the way that you and I have the Spirit in the New Testament sense of the permanent indwelling of the Spirit. In the Old Testament, God somehow gave his Spirit and had his Spirit anoint his servants in a way that enabled them to do the tasks that he would have them carry out; within David's lifetime, would have seen King Saul lose that anointing of the Spirit of God for his disobedience, 1 Samuel 16:14. And what David is saying, it would seem, is saying, "God, don't take away that anointing of the Spirit that enables me to serve you as your king simply because I have rebelled against you." David still belongs to God. Here he is still redeemed, and he's not asking for his salvation to be restored, contrary to an Arminian view that says you can lose your salvation. That's not true. David is asking God to restore the joy of his salvation. "God, this past year has been hard on me as I have lived in unconfessed sin and felt the weight of conviction that comes from that as I have tried to hide it and cover it up. God, deliver me from that place of misery and bring me back to the place of joy that belongs to those who walk with you. Restore my joy."

And how confident was David that God would answer his request? Completely confident and, beloved, this is what you have to understand, that your confession of sin and your hope of God's forgiveness and restoration is not based on your conduct. It has nothing to do with whether you deserve this or not and so it is an utter futility, it is in utter waste of your time to try to fix your life and to start being better and to start acting more obediently and then maybe God, once he sees you through a period of probation, then maybe God will restore that joy to you. That's not it. Let me free you from the confused chains that bind you when you think that way. That could never be it. Your imperfect obedience could never bring you the perfect joy of Christ and it would be foolish of God

to grant it to you on that basis. Remember, the whole premise of David's prayer is found in verse 1, "Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions." This sincere confession has the assurance of God's immediate blessing. Why? Because it is based on the immutable compassion and loyal love that God has to his people. So when we come and confess sin in an honest way, we are met immediately and without hesitation by a gracious God who wipes it away, who cleanses us, and restores us to the fullness of fellowship with him.

You say, "But that's incredible! But don't I have to do something to deserve that?" To which I would say, "Don't you understand what we've been saying for weeks, that the kingdom of God operates on a principle of grace, not on merit?" We say it again and again, don't we? I think at some point it's going to sink in and take root in all of our hearts and thinking. This operates on a principle of God's compassion, not your deserving, and that's why those of you who struggle with doubt and assurance, those of you who always are wondering, "Have I done enough? Isn't there more that I should be doing?" Abandon your self-righteousness. Abandon your effort to deserve it because you never can. You never can. Turn instead to the richness of the promises of God that are in his word.

This is laid out here in Psalm 51 so that all of us would enter into the glorious grace that David knew that he could avail himself of. This is your spiritual freedom that is being presented to you tonight from Psalm 51. And David anticipates God to grant his request. He knows that God is going to restore the joy of his salvation so he says, "God, here's what I'm going to do with it." Verse 13, he said,

12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit. 13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners will be converted to You.

"God, once you deal with me like I know you're going to deal with me because I'm appealing to your compassion, not my merit, once you deal with me and cleanse me like this, I am going to pivot away from my self-preoccupation and confession here and give myself over to teaching other sinners your ways so that they also could be restored to you." He commits himself to future service. He says, "Once this restoration takes place, I'm moving forward, God, to serve you in an instructive capacity so that other sinners will know the benefit of what you're giving to me here."

Those young people of you that you're in Christ now, you have come to Christ at an early age, praise God for that. Wouldn't it be a wonderful life occupation for you to give yourself to, that if God has forgiven you, that you would give over those future years of your life to teaching sinners about the grace of God, becoming a man of God to teach others the Scriptures so that others could hear the things that you benefit from. Wouldn't it be wonderful for us as adults to speak more freely, more boldly, more clearly in our sphere of relationships, to speak more clearly to tell other sinners about what we have heard, about what God has done for us. Wouldn't that be a wonderful way for us to be? Tell others about Christ and not just cast it off on that next coming generation, although I

think God should raise up some men of God from the young people in this room. I do believe that, but for us to give ourselves over to that wonderful task. Christ saves sinners. Christ has mercy on those who don't deserve it. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of grace. Let's tell people that.

Well, David goes further still, point 3, when he expresses a prayer of appreciation. David now turns the corner to gratitude. Look at verses 14 and 15. He says,

14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation

I think what he's saying here is, "God, I realize I deserve the death penalty. I have murdered and committed adultery. Those are capital offenses against your law. Deliver me from that.

Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness. 15 O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your praise.

So what David has done here, he says, "Open my mouth," he has gone from the silence of shame in his state of unconfessed sin, the silence of shame, you know what it's like. You know how your mouth shrivels up in speaking about the things of God when you know you're carrying about unconfessed sin. You know exactly what that's like. David says, "Open my lips, Father. Let this restoration result in me moving away from the silence of shame to shouts of praise, to sing joyfully of your grace, to sing joyfully of your righteousness. God, I want to praise you for what I know that you're doing now as you're cleansing my heart."

And in verses 16 and 17, he teaches the positive side of the negative lessons that Psalm 50 was teaching. Remember what we said about some 50? Formality, going through the motions, hypocritical life and how it called forth a sacrifice of thanksgiving in verse 23 of Psalm 50. God says you need to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, well, here's David showing what that looks like in verse 16. He says,

16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

What he's saying here is he is not casting aside the whole sacrificial system at this point in redemptive history, that God had established through Moses. What he's saying is that that sacrificial system presupposes – watch this – a chastened and trusting heart. He said, "God, I understand. You just can't go through the motions. I can't just slit the throat of a bull and think that that's acceptable to you if it's not being presented from a heart that is loyal to you." You know what that's like too. Do you want gifts from somebody that you know is a disloyal person? The gift almost becomes an insult. If a traitorous friend offers you a gift without a reconciliation in the relationship, the gift becomes an insult. "This isn't sincere!" you say. Maybe you don't yell quite like that but that's the cry of your heart. "This isn't sincere. This is an insult because our relationship is not right." Well,

what David is saying, "God, I understand, God, that what you want is sincere loyalty and that's what I offer to you. God, a broken and a contrite heart is what I present to you." God receives sinners who come to him. God is merciful to those who feel guilt and confess it to him. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." What a wonderful God God is. What a magnificent benevolence runs throughout his holy undivided character, to be kind like that to people who have sinned against him.

Well, we need to wrap this up. Point 4. We've seen David pray in confession, verses 1 through 9; we've seen him pray for restoration, verses 10-13; we've seen him pray a prayer of appreciation, I'm not sure I got that third point out if you're taking notes, a prayer of appreciation there in verses 14 through 17. And now he closes with a prayer of intercession. Point 4: a prayer of intercession. As king, David's sin affected the nation, not just himself personally, and so he turns to pray for God's blessing on the nation. He turns his focus outward, verses 18 and 19.

18 By Your favor do good to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem. 19 Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices, In burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.

Do you see what he does? He prays for the people of God that have been affected by his sin. "O God, build them up and protect them because my sin compromised our national safety, and so be merciful in that way." Then in verse 19 you see that, "Then Lord, once this inner spiritual restoration has taken place, then we can present the sacrifices that your law calls for knowing that you will be pleased with them under that condition." So he's praying that others, that God's blessing would spill over to others, and isn't that what you do also as you're walking with God? Aren't you praying to God asking him to spill the blessing over to others as well? Restoration leads to gratitude, leads to intercession because you want others to join in the mercy.

Let's wrap it up like this. As you come here tonight, as you think about your relationship with Christ, maybe still in sin, unregenerate, unsaved, or you're a Christian that has simply lost your path, this Psalm invites you to come to Christ, the one who receives sinners, with the assurance, with the promise of the word of God – here's what you need to hear – with the promise of God's word that he will gladly receive you, that he will receive you well, that he will not turn you away. You can go to Christ knowing that he is gladly receiving you as you come because he delights in forgiving sinners. The Apostle Paul said, 1 Timothy 1:15, "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost." Do you know what, friends? God forgave David of adultery and murder; God forgive Paul of persecuting the church and of being a religious hypocrite in his own right; in some ways, God forgave David of such great sin; on the testimony of the Holy Spirit, he forgave Paul who was the greatest of sinners. Do you know what that means for you? If God forgave great sinners like that, he'll forgive you too. Go to him and be reconciled to him through the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for your great mercy, your great compassion, and your great loyal love. I pray, Father, that if there are some here tonight that feel the weight of unforgiven sin, that you would work in their hearts and lead them to Christ. Father, why would they turn away? I can't understand why they would turn away from yet again another gracious offer that you make of your Son for their salvation. Help them to make tonight the night that they truly turn.

Father, for those of us that are in Christ, maybe we've manifested our anger, maybe we've pursued lusts that we knew were wrong, maybe we have just been cold and indifferent to your word, maybe we've lied, maybe we've cheated, maybe we've been disobedient to our parents in ways that bring shame upon our name, whatever the course of sin, Father, the answer is the same: the blood of Jesus your Son cleanses us from all sin. We humbly confess our sin before you tonight, Lord. We thank you for the assurance that you cleanse us from all unrighteousness when we do. So we walk out of here, Father, not weighed down by sin but buoyed up by the wonder of your grace yet again. Thank you for your mercy which knows no end. Thank you for your faithfulness which is new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. Great is your love. Great is the wonder of belonging to you through our victorious Lord Jesus Christ. We pray in his wonderful, matchless, perfect, impeccable name. Amen.

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