

Summer Psalms

*¹ Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
² but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
(Psalms 1:1–2 ESV)*

*Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.
(Psalms 29:2 ESV)*

The Heart That Is Acceptable Before God

September 11th, 2016

Psalm 51:17

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to Psalm 51:17; that's on page 474 in your pew Bibles. This is the last message in our Summer Psalms series and we are doing something a little bit different this morning. Over the course of this series we have been looking at Psalms as a whole but this week I want to drill down on a particular verse. Psalm 51:17 is one of the most important verses in the Bible. It tells us what sort of person – what sort of heart is acceptable before God. There is nothing more important than that. Earlier this week in our RMM readings we read Psalm 49. Psalm 49 makes the point that everybody dies. The rich and the poor. The educated and the ignorant. The high and the low – EVERYBODY DIES. And everything that we thought mattered in our earthly life turns out to have been UTTERLY MEANINGLESS when compared to the urgency of a right relationship with God. You can't take your money with you, you can't take your property with you – the only land that you own forever is the grave that you are buried in. None of that matters! What matters is understanding who God is and who you are and how you can peace forever with him – understanding that is ULTIMATELY AND FINALLY the only thing that matters. Psalm 49 ends with these words:

Man in his pomp yet without understanding is like the beasts that perish. (Psalms 49:20 ESV)

Man in his POMP – in his RICHES, in his ARROGANCE AND SELF SUFFICIENCY – if he does not understand these things, in the end is no better than a dog. He dies. He is buried and he is gone. Therefore, what could be more important than understanding what God desires – what God accepts in the innermost parts of a man? Nothing. And that is what David has learned in Psalm 51.

We talked last week about the story behind Psalm 51. David in his middle years had become arrogant, established and self satisfied. He was a made man and he began to drift away from God and from his calling. He didn't go out any longer at the head of the army, rather David stayed home. He was retired, he was a man of leisure and he was headed for ruin.

He saw a beautiful woman – the wife of one of his soldiers – and he took her. He BELIEVED HIMSELF entitled and he sent for her, he lay with her and he sent her home again.

She became pregnant, David murdered her husband and married the woman and everything seemed about to turn out well for David until he was confronted by the Word of the Lord. The prophet Nathan came and told him a story about a rich man – a successful man, an established man – who stole a little lamb from his poor neighbour. David – a former shepherd boy – flew into a rage and declared that this man – in all of his self satisfied pomp and arrogance – this man deserved JUDICIAL EXECUTION. There was no sacrifice that David would accept – no recompense for such an evil deed. The man who did this thing deserved to die! Nathan looked at David and said:

“You are the man!” (2 Samuel 12:7 ESV)

You are the rich, proud, self-indulgent sinner who has done this despicable deed. You are the man and you deserve death for what you have done.

And in that moment David recognized his sin. He did not deny what he had done. He did not minimize or defend what he had done. He said simply:

“I have sinned against the LORD.” (2 Samuel 12:13 ESV)

I did it. I AM THE MAN.

Later, having received mercy from God and reflected at length upon his experience he wrote Psalm 51. Near the end of the Psalm David begins to turn outward towards the presence and the people of God. That's what real repentance does – it turns us out of ourselves and back to God and to God's people. Having received mercy David wants to share what he has learned. The silver lining, the unexpected blessing – the great take away and teaching point for David in all of his horrible experiences is found in verse 17 – this is what he wants to share with people and this is what I want to reflect upon with you this morning. We'll begin reading at verse 15. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

How many of you know that shame shuts the mouth of God's people? So David prays for grace to begin speaking again to the people of God.

16 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

I went WAY BEYOND what is provided for in the sacrificial system – I went WAY DEEPER into sin and depravity and here is what I learned, here is what I want to share. I want to tell people that:

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

18 Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem; 19 then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar. (Psalms 51:13–19 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

David had descended into sin and David had been rescued by the Lord and now David had a message to share with sinners. He wanted people to understand that:

The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. (Psalms 51:17 KJV)

That was the treasure that David salvaged from the muck. That is what he wanted sinners to understand. So what does that mean and how do we get it? Those are the obvious and urgent questions that I want us to think about in the time that we have today.

What Is A Broken And Contrite Heart?

So what is it? What is a broken and contrite heart? What does that mean? We can look at the words and we can look at other places where those words are used in Holy Scripture. Let's start with the word "broken" which is used twice in verse 17. Both times it translates forms of the Hebrew root *shavar* which means 'injury by fracture'.

The word translated as "contrite" is the Hebrew word *dakhah* which means 'to crush'. Literally then David says "a fractured and crushed heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Those words are found together again in Psalm 34:18 where we read:

The LORD is near to the **brokenhearted** and saves the **crushed** in spirit. (Psalms 34:18 ESV)

Same two words.

A similar group of words is used in Isaiah 66:2 where God says:

But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2 ESV)

So what is a broken and contrite heart? I think we can say 3 things with confidence.

1. A broken and contrite heart has been humbled, shaken and shattered

The crushed heart is the opposite of the hard heart. The prophet Ezekiel is told by God that his preaching will be largely ineffective because:

the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me: because all the house of Israel have **a hard forehead** and **a stubborn heart**. (Ezekiel 3:7 ESV)

Both of the Hebrew words there mean "hard" – the word translated as "stubborn" means hard, the ESV just didn't want to use the same English word twice in the same sentence. Israel had a HARD HEART – they were proud, they were deaf and they DEFIANT. Their heads and their

heart were like stone. God actually told the prophet that he would make him hard also so as to break through and break down their hard, stubborn hearts. He said:

Behold, I have made your face as hard as their faces, and your forehead as hard as their foreheads... for they are a rebellious house.” (Ezekiel 3:8–9 ESV)

The prophet Ezekiel is going to be the hammer that God uses to break up and shatter the hard hearts of Israel. He will break them of their pride and he will call forth a storm of judgment, collapse and calamity that will break against the house of Israel like a flood. They will be overwhelmed, they will be broken down and they will learn again how to bow before their Maker.

Secondly, I think we can say that:

2. A broken and contrite heart is open, soft and receptive before the Word of God

Isaiah 66:2 is one of the most frequently quoted Scriptures in this church. In it God says quite plainly:

this is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2 NRSV)

To be contrite is to be HUMBLE and to TREMBLE EFORE THE WORD OF GOD. It is to stand DOWN when God speaks. A person with a broken and contrite heart does not ARGUE with the Word of God. They don't say: “Well I don't think that could be right” or “I don't think that aligns with what I believe about God” or “I don't like what that implies about human dignity or my gender or my identity as a human being” they simply say: “The Lord has spoken, who can respond?” That is what it means to be contrite. That is what it means to be soft and receptive to the Word of God. The contrite person has learned not to trust in his or her own thoughts. They have learned – usually the hard way – that:

“The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9 NKJV)

A person with a broken and contrite heart understands very well that their heart naturally inclines

towards deception and self-delusion. We lie! To ourselves, to others and to God. We've learned the hard way not to listen to ourselves but rather to tremble before the Word of God.

Do you remember the parable of the sower?

³ “A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. (Matthew 13:3–4 ESV)

Do you remember what the path represents? It represents the heart that is HARD to the Word of God. Those people HEAR NOTHING. The word of God falls on them and they hear NONE OF IT. It does not penetrate and the devil steals it away. They go home and complain about the sermon. It was not relevant. I could not understand. It did not interest me. It never occurs to them that the problem might lie not in the pulpit but rather in the hardness of their hearts. C.H. Spurgeon said once:

“The same sun which melts wax hardens clay. And the same Gospel which melts some persons to repentance hardens others in their sins.”¹

Two people can hear the same Gospel preached. One person breaks and another hardens further into sin. Was it the preacher? Maybe it is sometimes, but other times, it is the heart of the hearer.

Thirdly, we can say that:

3. A broken and contrite heart is desperate and needy before God

Look again at Psalm 34 – all of these references come from Psalms of David – this is something David thought about. In Psalm 34 David says:

When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. ¹⁸ The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. (Psalms 34:17–18 ESV)

The Lord is near to those who cry for help and who understand their need for deliverance. A broken and contrite person knows that they are lost, knows that they are damned and knows that

¹ <https://puritanquoter.wordpress.com/2010/11/12/the-same-sun-which-melts-wax-hardens-clay/>

only God can save them. You have to come to the end of yourself before you are ready to take hold of God. That is the place where God wants you to be. He wants you to know your need so that you can receive his mercy. He wants you despair of self so that you can trust in grace. That's where he wants you – that's where he meets you:

a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. (Psalms 51:17 KJV)

The second obvious question then, is simply this: How do we get it?

How Do We Get It?

David learned that a broken and contrite heart is the ONE THING that God most wanted him to have. It was the one thing that David really needed in order to be acceptable before God – but how did he get it and how can we get it so that like him we can have peace with God?

The first two things I'm going to say are universal – they apply to everyone everywhere. First of all we need to see that for everyone who receives a broken and contrite heart:

1. It comes as a gift from God

David was not sitting around his house reflecting upon his sins and gradually, naturally, coming to a place of repentance and brokenness before God. This didn't come from inside David. He was moving on with his life, he was covering his tracks, enjoying his ill-gotten gains until God in his grace intervened. He hit from the outside through the prophet Nathan and he hit him on the inside through the Holy Spirit. That's how God does it. David knew about that, he said in Psalm 40:6:

you have given me an open ear. (Psalms 40:6 ESV)

The Hebrew literally says “ears you have dug for me.” You have BORED HOLES in my ROCK SOLID HEAD so that I could hear the Word of God and be saved. I didn't do that – you did that. You broke my heart, you opened my eyes and you dug out ears so that I could see, hear, repent and be saved. That's what God does; Old Testament and New. He did it to David and he did it to

Paul. Do you remember how the Apostle Paul came to saving faith in Christ?

He was marching towards Damascus, intent on arresting and torturing and executing the people of God. He was hell bent on JIHAD with no intention whatsoever of turning back; he was not wrestling or resisting – he was running head long into hell! And do you remember what happened? God intervened. He struck him with lightning. He knocked him down. He blinded him and shut him up so that he could hear the voice of God. Paul was marching towards that city like a strong man on a mission but after God intervened he was led into Damascus by the hand. He was groping about like a fool but he was now finding his way to God. You see that's what God does. He hits us where we think we are strong. He breaks us down and he bends our knees. He meets us where we're at and he puts us where he wants us. A broken and contrite heart is ALWAYS a gift from God.

Secondly – and again universally –

2. It comes as the Word of God is preached and applied

David's breakthrough came about under the Word of God. Nathan came with a Word from the Lord and he preached it prophetically and courageously over David and under that Word and with the help of the Holy Spirit – David repented. He broke in an instant before God.

That's how it always works. I'm not just saying that because I'm a preacher and I love the Word of God – God says that about the Word of God! In Jeremiah 23 God says:

Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and **like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?** (Jeremiah 23:29 ESV)

The Word of God is a HAMMER in the hands of the Lord. As you hear it the Holy Spirit WIELDS it against all your pride, all your arrogance, all your autonomy, all your secrets and all your sin! Some of you in this room who have received the gift of a broken spirit and who have been helped by God to truly repent and believe KNOW EXACTLY what I am talking about. For some of you it was a single verse that God hammered into your soul and EXPLODED with dynamic effect. You heard ONE VERSE or ONE SERMON and it WRECKED YOU forever.

For others it was the cumulative effect of verse after verse, chapter after chapter, week after week in the Word until finally you had to surrender, you cracked under the pressure, you broke down and you humbled yourself before the throne of God.

That's how God changes people – that's how he saves people. The word of God washes over and the Spirit of God works within to break, save and change a human heart. There is no truly broken heart until it is broken by and towards the life giving Word of God.

Thirdly – and these next several are variable – depending on how God works:

3. It comes often when we're young

There is an obvious contrast in the text between David the young man and David the old man. In his youth David had a heart after God. He was almost ludicrous in his boldness and faith. As an 18 or 19 year old boy he stood across the field and defied the champion of the Philistines. “You come against me with sword and shield, but I COME AGAINST YOU IN THE NAME OF THE LIVING GOD! I'm going to kill you and then I'm going to chop off your head and take it to the walls of our enemies!” David is literally BURSTING WITH FAITH AND BOLDNESS! If God is for me, then who can stand against me? He was SO ALIVE to the Word and to the glory of God! What happened? Success, peace, wealth and sex. David fell in love with those things and he forgot his first love of the Lord.

It happens sometimes in middle age. When we are young our hearts seem closer to the ways and word of God. Jesus said:

3 “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:3–4 ESV)

You know sometimes Christians doubt the faith of little children. They'll say to me “Pastor, do you think its wise to baptism 6 and 7 and 8 year old boys and girls. Is their faith REAL?” Let me tell you something it isn't the faith of children that concerns me in this church it is the faith of adults. With adults – men and women in their PRIME and in their STRENGTH there seems to be so much reservation, so many doubts, so many cordoned off areas. Not so with little children.

Their faith is simple and all embracing. If God says it then it must be true, the children say, because he is bigger and wiser than we. Unless you turn again toward a “child-like” faith then you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

I know the Bible is not saying that old people cannot enter the kingdom of heaven – we’ve seen many old people saved like the thief on the cross – but I am saying this – there is no better use of our time and resources than in sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with little children. They are **ALREADY SO CLOSE** to the kingdom of God! They need only the slightest encouragement to embrace the mercy and grace of God. Their hearts are naturally humble and tender and open. Such hearts he will not despise.

Fourthly – and again depending on how God works; a broken and contrite heart comes often:

4. It comes often through spectacular failure

David had a heart for God in his youth, he lost it in his middle years and he was given it back through public and spectacular failure. I mentioned last week that even though David took FULL responsibility for his sin, he was nevertheless helped by God to see Divine Purpose in it. God will often ordain a season of spectacular failure in order to break up a carelessly hardened heart. Our grandparents wrote about that in our original statement of faith. In chapter 5, paragraph 5 of the Old Baptist Confession it says this:

The most wise, righteous, and gracious God does often times leave for a season His own children to manifold temptations and the corruptions of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon Himself....²

God will sometimes give you over to your favourite flavor of sin and stupid to wake you up to the deceitfulness of your own heart and wise you up to your desperate need for a close and careful walk with Him. That you may be humble; that you may be broken and contrite before him.

Lastly – and again depending on how God works –

² The Baptist Confession of Faith, 1689. Chapter 5, Paragraph 5.

5. It comes often through sickness, weakness, suffering and death

The Apostle Paul was saved by God from a hard and arrogant heart by his persistent thorn in the flesh. Do you remember that?

to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7 ESV)

Paul wasn't given the opportunity to become proud and hard in his middle years – God gave him a debilitating physical weakness. Nothing keeps a man broken in spirit better than a broken and dysfunctional body.

I know we don't like to hear it, but in a lot of ways, sickness, death and dying are a gift. I did the funeral for Ron McRae this past Friday. He was Big Ron to his friends and family. He was a big man, a strong man and for most of his life a proud man. The sort of man who didn't think much about what comes after death – the sort of man who never expected to die at all. But just like Psalm 49 reminds us – EVERYBODY DIES. And those who can never get their hard heads and their stubborn hearts around the truth of who they are and the truth of what God has done in Christ to secure their salvation DIE LIKE BEASTS and are buried and forgotten – that's what the Bible says. And nothing gets a strong man thinking about eternity more than an extended season of weakness, sickness and impending death. It got Ron thinking.

I remember when he started listening. When I would first go to visit him he'd leave Fox News playing loud in the background. That way he could tell Linda that he had a visit with the pastor without actually having to listen to anything the pastor said. But then as Ron's health declined so too did the volume of Fox News until one day, it didn't come on at all. Ron wanted to hear the Bible. Soon after that Ron gave his heart to the Lord. If it had not been for weakness, sickness and death, Ron McRae would never have been received the gift of eternal life.

Conclusion:

You see my friends, God doesn't FIND what he loves – he MAKES what he loves. He didn't

find Ron acceptable – he made Ron acceptable. He took his strength, he took his health, he bent his knee and he turned his eyes towards the person and work of Jesus Christ! That’s what God does!

By his grace, through his Word, with his Spirit, when we’re young, or when we’re old, through failure, loss, sickness, suffering and death GOD BREAKS US AND MAKES US ACCEPTABLE UNTO HIM.

A broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. (Psalm 51:17. KJV)

Let’s pray together.

“O God we are a naturally hard and stubborn people. Open our eyes; dig ears for us, break and soften our hearts to believe and to receive the implanted and saving Word we ask in Jesus’ Name, amen.”

Jody, will you come and lead us?

Note to worship leader: I would like to do the benediction at FBC even though I am leaving after for RCC. I have a certain “call to prayer” in mind that it would be easier to deliver myself.