

Psalm 51

The Joy of Salvation Restored

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation...v. 12

You'll notice in the title to this Psalm that it's addressed *To the chief Musician*. This indicates to us that this was a public Psalm. David's sin would not be private as much as he may have desired it to be. One of the deepest and most painful humiliations that may arise from sin is the exposure of sin. We read in Eccles. 12:14 *For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether [it be] good, or whether [it be] evil.*

The title further reminds us that David's private sin had been exposed. God had revealed it to Nathan the prophet and Nathan confronted David with the sin of taking another man's wife. Now, in a sense, David's sin is all the more exposed to future generations through this song that's committed to the chief musician for use, no doubt, in public temple worship.

God's purpose in leading David to compose this Psalm, however, is not that David may be perpetually humiliated by the exposure of his sin but that ensuing generations might know, what David himself came to know – that there is a way back to God when we stumble and fall and sin. Indeed – there's a way back to God when we fall into grievous, heinous and wretched sin.

What a heavy burden David's sin had placed upon him. It's easy to see from his petitions recorded in this Psalm that he felt the awful defilement of his sin. Notice the emphasis on *wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity – cleanse me from my sin – v. 2. Purge me with hyssop – v. 7 – wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.* How keenly he felt the filth of his sin. How very aware he was of his defilement before God.

I fear that this is something that is altogether lacking in our day. It's a sure mark of a climate of spiritual declension and it's one of the things that is first corrected in a time of revival. The history of revival shows that each outpouring of God's Spirit brought with it first deep heart-felt conviction of sin.

We're much more prone to dismiss our sin as being something of little consequence. This is made all the easier by living in a culture that by and large accepts so much that's sin. And by comparing our own sins with the sins of a pagan culture that we find all around us we find it very easy to say to ourselves – *my sin isn't so bad. Sure it may be sin – but it's nothing in comparison to other people's sins.* And so we minimize our sins and focus instead on what we think are the far more serious sins of others.

Where this kind of rationale is present and Christians go on for long periods of time thinking so little of their own sins, they don't even notice when something vanishes from their lives. Something that's missing and something that's essential in their walk with the Lord and their service to Christ.

This missing element that I'm now about to reveal to you was gone from David's life. Indeed – had he not lost this essential element in his walk with the Lord he may not have fallen into deep sin to begin with. What is this missing element that is so essential? Look at v. 12. I think this petition could be taken as the focal point of the entire Psalm – *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.*

How often do we have need of this petition! How weak we become without this joy. How vulnerable we become of going from bad to worse. How unkind we become – how easily provoked we become – how spiritually insensitive we become to the things of God. Without even knowing it we reach the place where in our pride and self-righteousness we think we can see so clearly what needs to be done to remove the speck from someone else's eye while being oblivious to the beam in our own eye.

This is something we need to beg God for this morning – *restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.* Apart from this restoration we remain weak for the joy of the Lord is our strength we're told in Neh. 8:10. Apart from this joy the Christian life becomes hard. Apart from this joy our devotion becomes forced.

The wonderful thing about the Lord's table is that it can be the very thing that God will use to hear and answer such a prayer for the joy of salvation to be restored. You know, of course, that it doesn't happen automatically. You know that if you would gain the blessedness of former days then you must heed the call of this ordinance to serious and solemn self-examination. We must follow the example of David And that solemn examination should lead to the petition of v. 12:

Restore Unto Me the Joy of Thy Salvation

I have a number of considerations I'd like to call to your attention from this text in its context. Would you think with me first of all on:

I. The Potential for This Restoration

Some of the Psalms are not very specific when it comes to their historical context. This particular Psalm is very specific. We have no doubt about the occasion for this Psalm. David had fallen into great sin. He had taken another man's wife. And then he tried to cover up the consequences of his adultery by creating the misimpression that the child she bore was her husband's child. And when that didn't work he arranged to have that husband murdered and to cover the sin of murder by making it appear that the murdered victim was slain in battle.

The sin of adultery, the sin of murder, the sin of dishonesty – these were the things that weighed upon David's heart and mind. It's no wonder he felt the need for cleansing. He was certainly defiled by sin. And it's no wonder he felt the weight of guilt. He was guilty of sin. Look at his petition in v. 14 *Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation.* Isn't that a vivid term to describe the sin of taking another man's life – *bloodguiltiness.*

Now the thing that becomes easy to do this morning is to position ourselves the same way that self-righteous Pharisee positioned himself in the temple when he prayed *Lord, I thank thee that I am not like other men*. How easy it would be for us to pray *Lord, I thank thee that I'm not like David was in the time of his great fall*.

I would hope that no one would be tempted to think that way this morning. The truth is that when you harbor lusts in your heart you are guilty of the sin of adultery. You are no less defiled than David just because the sin was harbored in your mind but thankfully was not actually committed. And the term *bloodguiltiness* applies to those whose anger gets the best of them – who lose patience with their boss, or their neighbor, or their children or other relatives.

O but you don't understand the provocations I face – you reason. You don't know what kind of pressures I'm bearing. You don't know what kind of tension fills my head and my heart and my home. And in some cases you might be right. I may not understand what you're going through. In many cases, however, you wouldn't be right. I could say that I do know exactly what you're going through as do many others.

The point I want to impress upon you, however, is that neither one of us would fall to these provocations and pressures if our hearts were being ruled by the joy of salvation. This is why I say we must earnestly beseech God as David does in this Psalm to wash me, cleanse me, purge me, deliver me and restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.

If the joy of salvation is my strength then I won't act rashly. If the joy of salvation is my strength then I'll find patience that I never thought I could find. If the joy of salvation is my strength then I'll find the capacity to be kind and loving even when I feel I'm deprived of the kindness and love of others.

Doesn't the broken body and shed blood of Christ bear witness to the truth that Christ loved most at the time He was loved least – indeed at the time when He was most despised He nevertheless showed forth His greatest love.

Now I believe that the reason the Lord chose David's sin to be the occasion of such a Psalm as we find in this 51st Psalm is that the people of God would not seek to justify their own sin by comparing themselves to David and saying *I'm not as bad as he was on that occasion*. You miss the point in thinking that way. The point is that in spite of how great a fall David experienced – he was, nevertheless, not beyond the realm of being restored.

In another Psalm that most likely makes the same historical reference to David's great sin as Psalm 51 we read in Ps. 32:5 *I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin*. The Psalm begins: *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile*.

What David prays for in Psalm 51 he testifies that he receives in Psalm 32. This is the point that must be emphasized. This is the reason that the heinous nature of David's sin is

recorded for us. We see the potential for restoration. We see that the joy of salvation can and should and by the grace of God will be our portion. The potential is there for the restoration of this joy. There is no excuse for us to come away from the Lord's table without this joy of salvation being our portion. Would you consider with me next that not only do we see the potential for this restoration but we see next:

II. The Need for This Restoration

Under the first heading we considered David's sin. Under this heading we need to look closer at David's misery. The two of course go hand in hand. Where there's sin there's misery eventually. In v. 8 we come to see something of his misery. Look at what it says in that verse *Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.*

It's an interesting expression isn't it – broken bones. And yet David's distress was not physical. He was not suffering from disease or from a crushing blow received in battle. Why this reference to broken bones? I think we can draw the lesson from this statement that when the joy of salvation leaves us and the weight of our sin visits us and we come under conviction from a conscience that reminds us of our sins, we can become so downcast and so miserable that it becomes practically impossible to even function physically. Our bones might as well be broken because we don't even find the motivation to face the next day and it's all we can do to drag ourselves out of bed in the morning.

There were, of course, other factors contributing to David's misery. We've already considered his keen sense of being defiled. Verse 11 indicates to us that there was no sense of God's nearness and there was no experience of spiritual sensitivity. *Cast me not away from thy presence* he prays. And what does that petition in the context of David's sense of sin indicate to us but that the presence of God was a thing of the past. *Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.*

When the Holy Spirit's absence becomes a felt reality then we're left to hearts that become hard and insensitive to the things of God. You may try to read your Bible but all you really do is drag your eyes over the words. Your heart isn't open to the word because other things dominate your heart. Devotion and prayer and worship become forced labors. I think David alludes to this in v. 16 where he writes *For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.*

Now we know that the sacrifices of the Old Testament and the burnt offerings in the Old Testament were ordained by God. The Levitical form of worship was in place during the days of David. Why then do we read that God doesn't desire these things? I believe the answer is that God has no desire for mere external compliance. And indeed the next verse that speaks of an acceptable sacrifice makes reference to the heart. *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.* Heartless worship is unacceptable to God. The sacrifices were designed to produce broken and contrite hearts.

And could I add here that the bread and the cup should serve the same purpose in our lives. To those who think their sins are inconsequential – that they are small in comparison with the sins of others – see what your sin brought upon Christ. See how your sin called for the breaking of His body and the shedding of His blood. Single out any sin – even the most seemingly insignificant sin. Could Christ’s sufferings have been lessened because of your low estimate of the seriousness of your sin? You know the answer. You know that your sins called for His broken body and shed blood.

The words of our text certainly indicate to us that the joy of salvation was gone from David. In the place of that joy was misery. This is how you know then that you need the joy of salvation restored to your soul. The reality of sin dominates your soul. Your times in prayer and times in the word are heartless. The weight of your responsibilities in life become so heavy that you feel as if you’re buckling under the weight of a load that presses your shoulders and hurts your back. You are physically strained by a spiritual condition. You cannot go on without making our text your petition. You must be restored to the joy of your salvation. God must hear and answer that prayer or else you’ll collapse under the load you bear.

We’ve seen then, the potential for restoration and the need for restoration. The need is a desperate need. It’s essential for the child of God to regain the joy of salvation. Let’s think for a moment on:

III. The Means to This Restoration

And just as we’ve considered David’s sin and David’s misery under the previous headings we must come to consider now David’s confession. For this was the means to his restoration.

Look at vv. 3-5 *For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

David certainly manifests a keen knowledge of sin. He acknowledges the high crime of his sin and he confesses that his sin is consistent with a depraved and fallen nature that he had inherited the moment he was conceived. Confession of sin is the means to restoration. It is the means to the joy of salvation being restored. But we must be careful that we don’t merely externalize our confession of sin through a heartless acknowledgement of our sin. The aim must be confession that springs from a broken spirit and a contrite heart.

And the best way to attain that necessary brokenness is to contemplate the truth that your sin is ultimately against God and against Christ. The Psalmist makes reference to the brokenness of his bones in v. 8 and we’ve already considered that this is a figure of speech. Psalm 22:17 is a prophetic statement about Christ and the statement there is not a figure of speech when we read *I may tell all my bones; they look and stare upon me.*

We know through our knowledge of the history of crucifixions that when a victim was nailed to a cross that cross would then be hoisted into the air and positioned over a socket, so to speak, dug out for the planting of that cross and when the cross was released in order to be planted in that socket the resulting impact could cause a number of the victim's bones to pop out of joint.

This is what our sins brought upon Christ. Our sins brought the whip upon His back. Our sins pressed the crown of thorns into His brow. Our sins drove the nails into His hands and feet. Our sins suspended Him between heaven and earth. Our sins brought His Father's wrath upon Him. The way to a broken spirit and a contrite heart, then, is to confess our sins in the knowledge of what high crimes our sins are against God and the truth of what our sins brought upon Christ.

We must also note, however, David's faith in the love and mercy of God. His confession springs from that faith. Notice his plea in v. 1 *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.*

Do you see how his hope for restoration is grounded in the gracious character of God? Apart from grace and mercy we are altogether undone. Apart from grace and mercy we are helpless and hopeless. The matter is beyond us. There's nothing we can do. Our hope must rest in God's grace and mercy.

And yet I find something very interesting recorded for us in v. 14. *Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.*

Isn't it interesting to note that David's plea is for God's grace and mercy but David's anticipated song is God's righteousness. *My tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.* Wouldn't it have been God's righteousness that would have condemned David? Wouldn't righteousness be the very thing that David would somehow hope to escape? Wasn't God's righteousness the major contributing cause to David's misery?

Why would one so unrighteous as David – one who by his own confession had sinned against God, one who admits that God is justified when He speaks and clear when He judges – why would David magnify God's righteousness in song rather than God's grace or God's mercy?

The solution is found, of course, in David's understanding of the gospel. God's grace and mercy spring from His righteousness. Those animal sacrifices and those burnt offerings of David's day bore witness to the sacrifice to come. David knew and so must we know and appreciate that grace and mercy are grounded in the sacrifice of Christ. And so our hope for restoration to the joy of salvation is grounded in grace and mercy and righteousness.

The bread and the cup preach that to us. God is gracious; God is merciful and God is righteous. And because we know the harmony between these attributes of God we can

have confidence that God will hear and answer prayer and restore unto us the joy of His salvation.

You begin to see, I hope, how much springs from the joy of salvation. There are great benefits to knowing that joy. Our stability and peace and usefulness depend upon us knowing that joy. If that joy is our portion, then will we teach transgressors the ways of God. It won't do to attempt to show them God's ways if our countenances preach to transgressors that we're miserable because of our own sin. If the joy of salvation is our portion then we can expect that the Lord will open our mouths to show forth God's praise.

What a contrast we find then in this Psalm between misery and joy. We cannot truly function as we ought to apart from the joy of salvation. We can bear no testimony apart from that joy. We cannot glorify God without being able to enjoy Him.

May the Lord's table bring us to the place of that joy this morning. Our remembrance of Christ should humble us. We should be brought low for our sins. We should confess them with brokenness and contriteness. But we should also be reminded of the provision God has made for our deliverance. May we find deliverance from the guilt and misery of sin that we may this day enter into the joy of the Lord.