

PSALM FIFTY-ONE

This Psalm is perhaps the brightest gem in the entire book. It contains instructions so large and doctrines so precious that even the tongues of angels could not do justice to the full development of it.

In this Psalm David reveals that he is a very unhappy man. It is the plaintive wail of a bleeding heart and a broken spirit. The fountains of the deep have been broken up in the soul of the writer.

As a warning to others, who may be tempted also, God's Word frankly and fully describes the failures of His servants. The record of David's worst sins is an illustration of what sin can do to a man, even after he has passed the zenith of his life and has reached the climax of his prosperity and usefulness. Lusting after Bathsheba, a woman of remarkable beauty, David inquired about her, whereupon one of his servants reminded him that she was the wife of another. Nevertheless, "David sent messengers, and took her," and committed the sin of adultery. For this deliberate and dishonorable deed David was absolutely inexcusable.

Conception followed, and Bathsheba promptly reported her condition to David. In an attempt to shift the blame for her condition to another, David summoned Uriah, her husband, to return home. He came, but he consistently observed the custom of the people of the Middle East in that day by refusing to live at home with his wife during the time of war. Failing to accomplish his nefarious purpose, David finally ordered Joab to place Uriah in the front line during the hottest battle so that his death would be inevitable. This despicable plan worked. After David had wrecked the home of a faithful and loyal soldier, and had indirectly murdered Uriah, he took Bathsheba as his wife. "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." Don't forget that!

God does not ignore the sins of His children. In one way or another He deals with them in order that they may be restored to fellowship with Him, and again be able to render useful and effective service for Him. Approximately a year after David had sinned so grievously, God sent His faithful prophet, Nathan, to declare unto him his terrible personal guilt and the intense displeasure of God because of his dastardly conduct in committing two of the worst sins, namely, adultery and murder. And, as has happened in many other cases, the second sin was committed in an attempt to cover up the first one. In this entire uncalled-for and disgusting affair David and Bathsheba had failed to take into consideration the fact that they would have to reckon with God.

This was a very difficult assignment to approach the king, whose authority and will no one dared challenge, and to tell him that he was a great sinner. In the performance of his duty God's preacher was just as skillful and tactful as he was brave and courageous. Nathan told David one of the most touching parables in all literature. With simple pathos he told him a stirring story of the injustice of one man to another, in that a rich man with great flocks had stolen the only ewe lamb of a poor man. It was such a dramatic and graphic portrayal that it had an immediate effect, just as Nathan had anticipated.

It should not be difficult for us to visualize the enraged David as he bit his lips, clenched his fists, and said: "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die." David was extremely indignant as he thought of a rich man taking the only lamb a poor man possessed, but seemingly he did not have any consciousness of personal guilt at having taken the wife of one of his soldiers and having him put to death. David is a splendid illustration of the fact that it is so much easier to go into a rage about the sins of others than it is to be indignant on account of our own transgressions. Although David had listened attentively to Nathan's sermon, he never applied any of it to himself, and in this he is typical of this line: "The preacher is certainly digging

up that scoundrel who has stolen that lamb, whoever he is." David became so angry at the man who had committed this serious offense that he pronounced a sentence of death on him, not realizing that he was pronouncing judgment on himself. Just as soon as David had pronounced the death sentence on the man in the parable, Nathan did a tremendously courageous thing. He fearlessly and dramatically looked into the face of the lust-smeared and blood-stained king and boldly declared, "Thou art the man." What an indictment!

Such a bold and unexpected application of the story shocked David and aroused his slumbering conscience. David's cheeks turned pale, his knees got weak, and he fell on his face in genuine repentance, confessed his sins, and sobbed out his prayer to God in which he asked for forgiveness and restoration. He abhorred himself and the sin which had brought him into such a bondage. His prayer was very becoming of one who had sinned so grievously.

There is a vast difference between prayers arising from the influence of habit and those which grow out of a deep sense of guilt, need, and dependence. When David uttered the remarkable prayer recorded in Psalm fifty-one, he realized fully that he needed the grace and mercy of God. Consequently, his requests were simple, pointed, earnest, and persevering. How personal were his cries! How intense was his pleading! He did not try to excuse his sin. He did not plead any mitigating circumstances. He did not try to blame anybody else for his sins. He frankly acknowledged that his sins were acts of rebellion against God. He realized that he had wronged God more than he had injured others.

I. A Prayer For Pardon. Psalm 51:1-4.

David's plea for pardon found its basis in the following:

1. His consciousness of sin.

David's sins had grieved God, hurt others, and injured himself. He said: "I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me." He could not hide it from his view or erase it from his memory, so it caused him to be miserable.

2. His confession of sin.

David was burdened greatly with the sense of his own sinfulness. So, he confessed in these words "I acknowledge my transgressions." It is easy to recognize and acknowledge the faults of others, but it is difficult to confess one's own sins, especially those which are as serious and grave as the word "transgression" indicates. A transgression is a deliberate and willful violation of the expressed will of God. David used the plural -- "transgressions" -- in his confession because his sins included adultery, treachery, and murder.

It is not always easy to believe that the sins we commit are our own. We are prone to try to blame others for our sins. We attempt to place the blame for them anywhere except on ourselves. We blame the tendencies we have inherited, the training we have or have not received, the circumstances in which we have been placed, or the temptations by which we have been assailed. But we find none of this sort of thing in David. He readily admitted that the guilt of his sins was his alone.

David not only recognized the evil of sin, and that the sins were his own, but he also regarded his sins as being hostile to God. He knew that what he had done was evil in the eyes of God. He had sinned grievously against society, but it was the fact that his sins were so offensive to God that chiefly impressed and distressed him. Every

sin of every person against one of his fellows is offensive to God. You cannot harm your fellowman without wronging God. David came to the realization that he had wronged God more than he had injured others.

3. His confidence that God would forgive him.

Out of the depths of his sin and moral degradation David cried: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness." Mercy is kindness to the underserving. Real mercy comes only from God. David expressed a deep and urgent desire in his appeal, "be gracious unto me." Nothing but the mercy of God could meet his need. He dared not ask for justice. Only a self-righteous person would be presumptuous enough to think of doing that. Wisdom would prompt any child of God to ask for mercy and forgiveness.

Loathing his sin and grieving because he had committed it, David prayed, "According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions." "Blot out" means to wipe off or expunge. He regarded his sins as a blotted record which needed to be removed completely. David wanted more than a cancellation of his sinful record; he wanted it expunged or wiped off completely. Wouldn't you like for people to erase completely from their memories every sinful statement they ever heard you make, and every sinful deed they have ever seen you do? That is just what God in mercy does when He forgives you. Your sins are forgiven, blotted out, and no longer held against you.

This word "thoroughly" suggests the need of a vigorous through and through process of washing to remove the deeply embedded and unclean substance. It is like the act of washing a garment by means of kneading. David's iniquities were so great and so deeply ingrained that nothing less than a vigorous, penetrating cleansing would be satisfactory. The phrase "from mine iniquity" is another indication of his personal consciousness of sin. David said, "My sin is ever before me." "Before" means in front of, and "ever" means continually. He was saying that his transgressions and sins stood out in front of him all of the time. God would not let him forget them and live without their haunting presence.

David never would have prayed, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin," had he not been convinced that he needed to be washed. The difficulty nowadays is to convince people that they need to be washed. The Lord has as much trouble with His children in this respect as some parents have with their off-spring. I do not know why it should be so, but there are some children who seem to be very much afraid of soap and water. They just do not seem to understand how useful they are, and how indispensable to cleanliness and good health. There are some grown-ups also who have never learned that they need cleansing. Many abhor the necessity of washing. Present-day religion for the most part, fails to recognize the necessity of being washed and made clean in the sight of God. How may one know his need of cleansing? He may discover his need of physical cleansing by looking into a mirror, and of spiritual cleansing by beholding himself in the mirror of God's Word. One cannot enter or abide in the presence of God without being made aware of a need of cleansing from sin.

Some boys and girls are fortunate enough to have parents who require them to pass inspection. In washing yourself, did you ever just touch the high spots lightly and have one of your parents to send you back saying, "You didn't half wash"? When we try to wash ourselves spiritually, not much is done. David prayed, "Wash me." This implies inability and submission. David could not wash himself clean from the defilement of his sin, so he prayed thus because he knew that, if God would do it, it would be done well.

Cleansing from sin is impossible without confession. A good many people are like a little boy who has broken the rule of the household and gotten mud all over him. He

says to himself, "If I can only get into that back door without anybody seeing me, and get up the back stairs and into the bathroom where I can wash, and to my room where I can change my clothes!" But to come to his parent, with all the mire upon him, and acknowledge that he had done wrong is quite difficult. And yet, how refreshing it is when we are forced into contact with something that soils us to go where we can be cleansed of it! "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). Confession of sin needs to be practiced daily by the people of God.