

THE RESTORATION OF JOY

"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation."
Psalm 51:12a

Perhaps David was about fifty years of age when he committed the double crime of wrecking the home and taking the life of a faithful and loyal soldier, whose name was Uriah. After doing those things, he was a very unhappy man, as one would expect.

Approximately a year after he had sinned so grievously in the case of both Bathsheba and Uriah, David was visited by Nathan the prophet. It was in mercy that God sent to David this preacher who was just as skillful as he was brave. Nathan told David a very stirring story of the injustice of one man to another. He told about a man who had many sheep, but who stole the only lamb of a poor man. The story so enraged David that he bit his lips, clenched his fists and said, "The man who did that thing shall surely die."

David was a splendid illustration of the fact that it is so much easier to go into a rage about the sins of somebody else than it is to be indignant on account of our own. David listened to Nathan's sermon, but never took a word of it to himself. He reasoned, "This man Nathan is certainly digging up that scoundrel who has been stealing sheep, whoever he is." Just then Nathan did a tremendously courageous thing. He pointed his finger into the face of this lust-smearing and blood-stained king and said, "Thou art the man." What happened then? David's cheeks turned pale, his knees got weak, so he fell on his face and sobbed out a prayer to God, which is recorded in Psalm 51.

David's prayer was altogether becoming in one who had sinned so grievously. It revealed a genuine sense of the destructive power of sin, a contrition of spirit and an utter repudiation of self. He adhorred himself for committing these sins. David did not offer any excuses for his sins, plead any mitigating circumstances or lay the blame on anyone else.

What were some of the things for which David prayed?

I. Pardon. Psalm 51:1-4.

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

1. His consciousness of sin.

His sin had injured him greatly. He said, "I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me." He could not erase it from his mind or hide it from himself, therefore, it caused him to be miserable.

2. His confession of sin.

David was greatly burdened with the sense of his own sinfulness. He said, "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 as serious as the word "transgressions" indicates. David used the plural -- "transgressions" -- because his sins included adultery, treachery and murder. A transgression is a deliberate and willful violation of the expressed will of God.

We are prone to blame others for our sins. We are willing to place the blame for them anywhere except on ourselves. We blame the tendencies we have inherited, the training we have 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 crimes was his alone.

He had not only sinned against others, but his sins were terribly offensive to God.

3. His confidence of divine forgiveness.

Out of the depths of sin and moral degradation David cried, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness." Mercy is kindness to the undeserving. Real mercy comes only from God. David expressed a deep and urgent desire in his appeal, "be gracious unto me." Nothing except the mercy of God could meet his need.

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 remove. 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 from their memories every sinful thing you ever said or did? That is what God in mercy does for you when He forgives you.

Not only did David regard his sin as a blotted record to be expunged, but also as a polluted robe to be washed. He prayed, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." David never would have prayed thus 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 offspring. 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 clother!" 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.

II. Purity. Psalm 51:5-11.

After he had acknowledged his sinful nature and confessed his sinful deeds, David expressed an intense desire to be purified. He wanted to be cleansed entirely and purified completely. In his plea for purification we find these expressions:

"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow... Blot out all mine iniquities. Great in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." A clean heart is an inward work of grace, or what God does in a person. A clean heart is one in which there is no known and unforgiven sin. In a clean heart there is the consciousness that there is nothing between the soul and the Saviour.

III. Peace. Psalm 51:12.

In his prayer to God David said, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." This request implies that three things are true:

1. There is joy in salvation.
Joy is the inevitable result of an experience of salvation. One cannot become a child of God without being made happy.
2. The joy of salvation may be lost.
David had known the joy which arises from being saved, but in his prayer he acknowledges that he had lost that joy. He had not lost his salvation, and never said anything about losing it. He was simply praying for that which had gone out of his heart, which was joy. Through his sins David had lost his joy, and he was longing for its restoration. He was asking God to give him back the joy which had been his when he was conscious of the divine favor.

Many others have lost the joy of their salvation. This is not an uncommon experience. The loss of this joy may be caused by:

- (1) The neglect of known duties.
 - a. Prayer.
 - b. Bible study.
 - c. Public worship.

If you do not enjoy prayer, Bible study, public worship, listening to sermons and fellowship with God's people as you did in days gone by, most likely it is due simply to your neglect of known Christian duties.

- (2) Carelessness.
Perhaps you have carelessly failed to watch the inmost desires of your heart which God sees and your outward actions which both God and men see.
- (3) Indolence.
A lazy Christian is the most easily tempted and the most miserable. Working for the Lord, out of a heart of love for Him, imparts both joy and strength. The most industrious Christians are the most joyful ones.

- (4) Worldliness.
Just in proportion as one gives more of his time, attention and energy to secular interests, he will give less and less to the service of the Lord.

- (5) Indulgence in sin.
Sin grieves God and causes Him to hide His face. Sin also blinds our eyes to the promises and the power of God. Sin makes the conscience of the Christian smart and throb. It was through indulgence in sin that David forfeited his joy. His communion with God had been interrupted by the sins which he had committed. Joy is impossible when spiritual communion is interrupted. God will not give joy to anybody who lives in sin. To do so would be to put a premium on disobedience.

God wants His children to be happy. Christ made this plain when He said, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). A joyful and radiant Christian attracts others toward Christ. There cannot be any usefulness in the Christian life unless there is joy in the heart. When joy is lost influence over others goes with it.

3. The joy of salvation may be restored.

- (1) This restoration of joy is desirable. David's earnest prayer, which was recorded in Psalm 51, revealed a real yearning for the restoration of a lost joy. Conscious of his great loss, for which he was altogether responsible, David longed for peace of conscience and the sense of the divine favor. He had lost that which the world could not give, and for which it could not compensate. Of this you may be sure, anyone who has once possessed this joy, who has truly experienced its sweetness and power, will never be content and happy to live without it. Because this joy is so desirable, there will always be a longing in the heart for its restoration.
- (2) This restoration of joy is possible. The pleasures of sin had cost David the joy of salvation. He wanted to have his former joy restored, and sincerely believed that such a restoration was possible. Therefore, he sought the restoration of joy by praying unto the heavenly Father, against Whom he had sinned so grievously, "Cause to return unto me the joy of thy salvation." David was not praying for an impossibility. He firmly believed in God's willingness to forgive and His power to restore. Joy may be restored to the heart of a child of God when the cause of the loss is removed. Joy is found in obedience to God, but never in rebellion against Him. It is found in fellowship with Him, but never in discord. If you will get within the circle of God's will for your life, you will enjoy peace and the divine favor.