

Psalm 51 August 2, 2020

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone into Bathsheba.

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

**Have mercy upon me, O God,
According to Your lovingkindness;
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,
Blot out my transgressions.
²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.
³For I acknowledge my transgressions,
And my sin is always before me.
⁴Against You, You only, have I sinned,
And done this evil in Your sight—
That You may be found just when You speak,
And blameless when You judge.
⁵Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.
⁶Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts,
And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.
⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
⁸Make me hear joy and gladness,
That the bones You have broken may rejoice.
⁹Hide Your face from my sins,
And blot out all my iniquities.
¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
¹¹Do not cast me away from Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
¹²Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.**

We pray: Dear God and Father, give us and renew in each of us a love for Your Word. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Over the course of the last several weeks here at Resurrection, we have been considering the Psalms as the basis of our Sunday morning meditations.

There is much we can learn from these inspired portions of God's Word, found in the Old Testament. Of the 150 Psalms, there are several that are Messianic which point forward to the coming Christ. Many of the Psalms are hymns of praise to God for His creation, salvation, perseverance, and the sustaining of His children. Some of the psalms emphasize doctrine or teaching. Other psalms are prayers to our God.

Some of the psalm were used in the worship life of the Tabernacle and later in the Temple. We still use portions of those in our worship services today., We sing part of this Psalm in every Sunday Service - it forms the Offertory. One verse is part of both Matins and Vespers. **O Lord open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise.** Another verse is part of our Confessional Service. **The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.**

Psalm 51 is a remarkable Psalm in several ways. First, it is remarkable that David wrote this Psalm about what had to be among the worst moments of his life. He was caught in murder and adultery and publicly denounced by the Prophet Nathan on behalf of God. We heard about this in the Old Testament lesson for this day, from 2 Samuel 11.

The Psalm is also remarkable because it teaches the doctrine of Original Sin. **Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.** When David made that statement, he was not accusing his mother of conceiving him in the midst of an immoral act. The king was saying that he was conceived sinful, he possessed what Holy Scripture calls original sin, inherited from his fathers, from Adam. David said that he was already sinful at his birth, and He got that way at his conception. David, like you and me had been born as an enemy of God, whose will was opposed to God. David like you and me had been born as a condemned sinner, worthy of damnation. Although David had been freed from the rule of his sinful nature, through faith in the coming Savior, with his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah, he had allowed sin to regain control over him, and as he knew and we know, he had fallen into terrible sin.

Psalm 51 also points to the cross - **Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.** There are a few places where the word hyssop is used in the Bible. Hyssop is a plant. You might remember when God was preparing to lead the Children of Israel out of Egypt after 400 years of slavery, the people painted the blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts and lintels of the homes with the hyssop so that the Angel of Death would passover their homes (Exodus 12). Hyssop is also used in various cleansing rituals in Leviticus, primarily cleansing a leper, or things infected with leprosy, and cleansing one who has accidentally opened a grave and touched a dead person. (Leviticus, Numbers) You might remember that hyssop appears is at the crucifixion, where it is used to lift a sponge soaked in wine for Jesus while on the cross to take a drink. That is significant, both then and now, in the light of the cross. (John 19:29)

Psalm 51 is clearly a penitential Psalm. In it, David sets forth his sin as primarily against God. **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.** David had committed adultery. He had gotten Bathsheba pregnant, and when he failed to convince Uriah, her husband, to do the husbandly things that might have hidden David's sin from public scrutiny, David had Uriah killed he fought nobly for Israel. Yes, David sinned against Bathsheba, and Uriah, and all of Israel, who were offended and misled by their king's sin, but here it becomes clear that sin is always first and foremost against God.

We heard in the epistle lesson for this day, **"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He (God) is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all iniquity. If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him to be a liar and His Word has no place in our lives"** (1 John 1:8-10). Each and every sin, a person commits, whether directed against others, against himself or against any other creature, is really a sin against God and God alone. Yes, every sin is an affront to God and sin displeases Him

(Isaiah 65:12; Isaiah 66:4). Every sin contradicts what the all high God says and commands. Thus, everyone who confesses sin as David did, namely that he has sinned and acted against God and God alone-he confesses his sins in the right way.

David illustrates for us how we, too, should repent of our sins, without excuse or explanation. **Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.** David makes no claims for any worthiness for forgiveness. He cries out for grace and forgiveness not according to his rank as king, but according to the greatness of God's compassion. David's only hope and comfort is God, and His love, His compassion, His grace.

This then, is the backdrop for some of the most familiar words from one of the greatest of psalms in the Word of our God.

**Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from Your presence; and take not Your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation; and uphold me with Your free spirit.**

“Create in me a clean heart, O God.” Look at that first word: *create*. It is the same word used at the beginning of Genesis: “In the beginning God *created* the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). To *create* means “to make something out of nothing”.

What does David want God to create in him? A *clean* heart. The word can also mean *pure*. How do you get pure gold? You melt the ore down until all the sludge floats to the top, skim it off, and you have pure gold. With his words, David was praying for God to create in him a clean, pure heart.

“And renew a right spirit within me.” To *renew* means to “repair” or “rebuild.” With his words, David was praying for God to repair his broken relationship with God because of his

unconfessed sins of adultery and murder.

David prayed for a *right* spirit. A *steadfast* spirit. One which walks right with God. A steadfast spirit which stays in step with God and His Word.

“Cast me not away from Thy presence.” To *cast* literally means to “throw.” Just like Moses threw down the two tablets containing the 10 Commandments and shattered them because he was angry with God’s people for worshipping the Golden Calf, so David prays that God would not throw him away in anger, that He would not *abandon* David. (Exodus 32)

David wishes to remain in God’s *presence*. Why? Because in God’s presence is our Lord’s blessings. Recall the Benediction we use at the end of the service. **“The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make *His face* shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The LORD lift up *His countenance* upon you and give you peace”** (Numbers 6:22-24). God’s countenance and His face are the same as God’s presence. So, David does not want to miss out on the blessings that come with remaining in the Lord’s presence.

“And take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.” Usually God *gives*. He gives peace, He gives joy, He gives hope...among countless other blessings. But sometimes God will withdraw His hand and *take away* blessings as punishment for unrepented sin.

And what does David ask God not to take away? The gift of the *Holy Spirit*. What is so special about the Holy Spirit? He is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity who works faith so that David can believe in God as his only comfort, his only strength, his only song. But with David’s unconfessed sins, David had “grieved the Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 4:30). With David’s impenitence gnawing away at his soul for up to a year, he is alarmingly on the verge of losing his faith, of falling into

unbelief, the “sin against the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 12:32) and the only sin that cannot be forgiven.

“Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation.” Do you remember the Parable of the Lost Sheep

and the Lost Coin (Luke 15)? A shepherd loses one sheep. A woman loses a coin. They search all over until they find what was lost. The sheep and the coin have been found; they have been restored.

That restoration, that “deliverance” is what God’s *salvation* is all about. God is the One who will save David from his sins. God is the One who will deliver David from death. God is the One who will rescue David from the power of the devil. Salvation brings with it a never-ending joy that comes with knowing that your sins have been forgiven, that you have peace with God and that at the end of this earthly sojourn eternal life in the presence of God will be yours. David also knows it is all about God. Only God can restore. Only God can save. Only God can bring salvation and bestow the joy which comes with it.

“And uphold me with Thy free spirit.” To *uphold* means to “support.” David asks God to forgive him, pick him back up and set him straight. And should he start to lean the wrong way again, David prays for God to set him on the right paths which lead back to God. And how will this be done?

With God’s *free spirit*. David prays for God to send His Holy Spirit to give him a “generous” and “willing.” Spirit. It is like a free-will offering. It is given voluntarily, willingly, freely, from the heart. With David’s newly restored pure heart, washed clean with God’s forgiveness, David prays for the Holy Spirit to give him a new lease on life so he can willingly serve both God and others.

My dear fellow redeemed, Psalm 51 in one significant and wondrous portion of God’s Word.

It speaks of sin and grace. It speaks of David a fallen, yet restored sinner. It speaks to you and me. For like David of old, we too are fallen and restored sinners.

May the prayer of David become our daily prayer

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.

Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free spirit.

And may God grant this for Jesus' sake, Amen.