

## The Repentant Heart: A Confessing Heart, 2

*The Repentant Heart*

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**Bible Text:** Psalm 51:3-6

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Amen. Let us together open God's word this morning to the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm. Psalm 51. If you're using a pew Bible, you'll find that on page 869. Psalm 51 as we continue with our series on this Psalm of David, and we have now come to the second section of Psalm 51, verses 3 through 6, and our concentration this morning will be particularly on verse 5.

Let us hear God's word as it is read in our midst from Psalm 51.

1 To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. 4 Against 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. 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. 6 Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.

Thus ends the reading of God's word from Psalm 51. Let us pray for the Lord's illumination this morning.

*Our Father in heaven, we do not approach Your word lackadaisically, we approach Your word, Father, humbly, acknowledging our dependence upon Your work in applying this word to our souls. Father, You know our souls intimately, more intimately than we know them so, Father, that means we have needs that we know not of, that You do know. Father, I pray that You would take this text of Scripture and so drive it into our hearts to address our every need including the exposing of our sin. May You do a good work in our hearts by Your Spirit, turning us once again unto You and finding in Christ Jesus all that we need. O Father, we thank You for Your mercy. Cause our hearts to revel in it this day. We pray all of this in Christ's name. Amen.*

You may be seated.

We continue with our consideration of this Psalm of David that gives us insight into the repentant heart which is the title of our series. And of course, our interest, brothers and sisters, is not in observing David's confession as though it was some type of journal entry or diary entry, though certainly we're given a window into the heart of David with his particular sin with Bathsheba and killing her husband Uriah, but let us be mindful that this Psalm is a part of holy Scripture and it is a Psalm intended for the people of God to have, let us pray that it has the effect of serving as a model for our own words coming from our own hearts as we repent of our sin and turn unto God.

We've considered repentance, the repentant heart, its beginnings. We've also seen that the repentant heart is a turning heart. And then last week we saw in this second section, we see that the repentant heart is a confessing heart in verses 3 through 6. The heart that truly sees differently, as we saw conviction. The word "conviction" has at its root "convince," so it is to have something you were convinced of that you now have changed and you're convinced of it in an entirely different way. You see it differently. Your perception is radically changed. So what you saw was a small thing, you now see as a big thing and as a most grievous thing.

So the confessing heart sees sin for what it is, doesn't it? It's mine alone and it's against the Lord alone. My greatest grief is not that it's injurious to me, my greatest grief is that I've offended God. That's at the heart of the repentant heart. But we find that David is not yet through with his confession as we move into verses 5 and 6 now where we find two "behold" passages. Verse 5, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me." Verse 6, "Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom." We're going to consider the first of these two "behold" passages this morning which is found in verse 5.

And as we've seen, the sin of David is very much present in the mind of David. He has confessed his sin. We have found that he acknowledges clearly his sin before God. What does he say? He says, "I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is ever before me." So David has his sin before him. He's acknowledging his sin to the Lord. But in our text this morning, we find that as a part of David's confession is an element of retrospectivity. We find David moving beyond his attention upon the sins that he actually has committed and he's setting his attention upon something even grander and greater. He's seeing a wider picture here as he traces his sin to its root.

He traces his relationship to sin back to his birth. What does it say in verse 5, the first line? "I was brought forth, brought forth from my mother's womb, I was brought forth in iniquity." And David then even goes beyond his birth, referencing sin in relation to David's very beginning where he references his conception, when he was conceived. He says, "And in sin my mother conceived me." So he's tracing back to the root of sin, saying, "I not only have sin that's ever before me, but I have a sin problem. I not only have sinned but I am a sinner. In other words, not only is my sin an action, but my sin is a condition, something that I have inherited. Getting straight to the point, I am not a sinner because I sin, I sin because I am a sinner." Let me say that again: I am not a sinner

because I sin, I sin because I'm a sinner already. I didn't become a sinner upon my first sin but David is saying, "I've always been a sinner for I was brought forth in iniquity, indeed, I was conceived in it already."

But how can you and I, brothers and sisters, already be a sinner before we're even born? How can we be said to have been conceived in sin? It almost sounds absurd. Now this exercise might seem a little silly at first but I wanted to make the point. When a mother believes that her child has reached a certain age where he or she can understand an instruction, can understand that when momma says this, you're supposed to do that, you know, what? One month? Five months? Eight months? A year? Two years? Take your pick. And the child hearing an instruction disobeys consciously, "I have been given this instruction and I'm choosing to do this instead." Is it then that the child becomes a sinner for the very first time because now that is the first sin that that child has committed? Not according to David.

Let's go a little further. What about when a mother is on the birth bed, whether it be a hospital or somewhere else, and she has a newborn in her hands right out of the womb, and immediately after the birth the mother says, "Now, sit up, honey, it's time to eat." And the baby fights it. Fights it. One might say, "Well, technically the child has disobeyed his or her mother." Is it then that the child then becomes a sinner because of that first sin in whatever fashion it might have come? Not according to David.

David says, "In sin my mother conceived me." But come on, David, how can you know enough to attribute sin to a microscopic being which is what you and I were in our mother's womb, right? How can David say that? How does he know that microscopic being has sinned? How can you, David, say that the child has sinned? That's absurd for surely at your conception and my conception, we had not committed any actual sin, not when we're just a little microscopic thing. Surely we've not committed any actual sins. Surely at our conception we have not actually transgressed the law of God as this microscopic piece of dust.

So is David absurd in making such a claim? Well, David, you see, what makes his claim so bold is that David is making a claim that has a universal nature to it. Not everyone has committed adultery like David, not everyone has committed murder like David, but everyone has been conceived like David. Everyone has been conceived just like David was conceived by natural generation, and has come forth from a mother's womb. That's true of everyone in this room. So David is making a universal claim that extends way beyond David's experience and is a universal experience. Indeed, all have been brought forth in iniquity from their mother's womb and in sin have we all been conceived.

David is related to the human race which is in sin, but has the human race always been in sin? No. Indeed, it probably would be better to say that David is a sinner not because he's a member of the human race but he's a sinner because he's a member of a fallen human race because it has not always been fallen, you see. The human race did not begin in such a fashion.

Taking the full revelation of God into account, we are given further insight into the origin of sin in the fifth chapter of Romans where we read these words and listen real carefully to this passage. The Apostle Paul writes, "Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin. So death spread to all men because all sinned." So we see David's sin condition and our sin condition is directly tied to our relationship to one man, namely Adam. That's where it all came from, and you and I are sinners because of our relationship to him is what Paul says.

Now wait a moment. In order for someone to be called a murderer, they would have had to have committed murder, am I right? If someone is called a thief, they have to have committed theft, right? If someone is called a sinner, that means that they had to have committed sin. So if universally all mankind are sinners in their mother's womb at conception, what sin have they committed that qualifies them to be called a sinner? What sin have they committed? They're the size of a speck of dust? Listen again to Romans 5. Listen, "Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, so death spread to all men because all sinned." There it is. Sinned. How is it that Paul can write "sinned" in the past tense, saying that all persons have already sinned, hence making them sinners? It's because all persons have sinned. All persons have sinned and this sin was not actual, this sin was by representation.

You see, Adam so represented you and me that it can be said that when Adam partook of the fruit, when he sinned, guess who sinned along with him? You and I sinned when Adam sinned. So when is it that we first sinned? In the garden of Eden, and that's why it's legitimate to be called a sinner because you have already sinned in Adam, you see, and it's for that reason all of his posterity that comes by way of natural generation can be said to have already sinned, because all of us sinned in Adam. We participated, as it were, by representation in him in that very sin.

Did you know that the first reading primer in the American colonies was a primer called "The New England Primer." Little children would learn how to read by this book. In fact, "The New England Primer" was the most successful textbook published in the US colonies in the 1600s, immensely popular and immensely useful to children. And one of the ways that the English alphabet would be taught to little children would be by ways of pictures and rhymes that would go along with those pictures. So they'd have a rhyme for the letter "A," and then a rhyme for the letter "B," and then a rhyme for "C," and so on. Well, do you know what the entry was for the letter "A" to help schoolchildren understand what the letter "A" is? This was it. Listen carefully: in Adam, there's your "A," in Adam's fall we sinned all. Children would grow up on this, learning their A, B, C's. In Adam's fall we sinned all.

Oh, how true that is. How true that is. You see, the reason David was a sinner in the womb of his mother is the same reason that you and I were sinners in the womb of our mothers. We all were related to the same man in whom we sinned all. Do you see that? We sinned all with Adam, therefore you and I are deemed sinners before we even hit a lick, before we ever have any actual sin that we produce in and of ourselves.

The distinction is made between our actual sins and original sin, as it is called, the sin we participated in with Adam in the garden of Eden. In fact, our Westminster Confession of Faith uses this very language very helpfully. It says every sin both original and actual being a transgression of the righteous law of God and contrary thereunto does in its own nature bring guilt upon the sinner, and so forth and so on, recognizing that we're guilty not only by our representation in Adam, original sin, we also are guilty by our own actual sin, but both are transgressions.

Now there is a subject matter that sadly is necessary to address as we embark upon this text, and parenthetically perhaps, I want to mention this issue to which this text speaks, and it pertains to the absurd notion that a human being is not a human being at the time of conception. Yet in relatively recent history, and I stress recent, in relatively recent history, the question has actually been posed whether a human is a human at conception or only a cluster of cells that really cannot be deemed a human being. But we should be mindful that the Scripture does speak to this subject not only implicitly but explicitly and it does so in this text right here, verse 5. In fact, this is a helpful passage to which to turn whenever we are thinking through this subject.

David by the Spirit's inspiration acknowledges that a living moral person exists when they come out of their mother's womb and they're born, but David goes beyond birth, did you notice? He goes beyond birth to acknowledge that a living moral person exists at the time of conception for he states, "in sin," which is a moral category, "my mother conceived me." So with the same certainty that David assigns moral language, iniquity, to his birth, he assigns moral language, sin, to his conception.

Notice the personal pronouns that you see in line 1 and line 2, the "I" and the "me," right? The same "I" that was brought forth through birth is the same "me" that was conceived in the womb. The person is a living moral creature of God as much at conception as it is at birth.

Now brothers and sisters, I just want to remind us since this subject seems to be so spoken of in our day, that the reason we affirm that a person begins his person-hood at conception is not because scientists have said one way or another, and it's not because it fits into some type of agenda that one has. Rather, this is our conviction only because God has spoken on this particular subject not only implicitly but explicitly on the matter of person-hood. So let us be reminded from where our conviction comes and this very text helps us on that particular subject of person-hood.

Now we must stop for a moment and step back from our text and ask a more general question that really hits at the heart of this text and that is why did David even say this? Did he say this for just our intellectual reflection? Did he say this strictly to provide us a very robust theology of creation? In what way is verse 5 included in his confession of sin? Because you remember the section we're in right now is the confession, a repenting heart is a confessing heart. So why is it that David brings this up? I ask us this question: does David, is he attempting to make the point in this Psalm to shift the blame of his sin to what he has inherited? Is that what David is doing here? Kind of shifting the attention

away from his actual sin and saying, "Do you know what? That's just my inherited condition." It kind of almost is drawing our attention away from his sin. No, we've already seen that David owns up to his sin, have we not? And he acknowledges his sin as his own sin. He acknowledges that it's against the Lord that he has sinned. Indeed, the repentant heart is a heart that does not blame-shift. We've already seen that in our consideration of Psalm 51, so what is it that David is doing here? Well, what he is doing is not trying to justify himself but he's completing his confession. David is actually humbling himself. He isn't letting himself off the hook. He's not excusing himself but actually he's further condemning himself.

Calvin put it this way, "David here refers to original sin with the view of aggravating his guilt, acknowledging that he had not contracted this or that sin for the first time lately but had been born into the world with the seed of every iniquity." He's referring to it to aggravate his guilt all the more. He's not justifying himself, he's further condemning himself. David is here confessing and lamenting the sheer depth of his sin and the greatness of his need. His need doesn't just have to do with adultery and murder, his need is much grander. He is showing that his problem, this problem and need far extends beyond actual transgressions of adultery and murder, his need is much greater and his sin is much more grievous. His need for mercy is wider than the ocean's shores. His need for mercy is deeper than the ocean floor. He recalls the deep roots of his sin problem to all the more excite his soul to turn to the Lord with his need, you see. That's what's going on here as David brings up this matter of where sin has come from. "My problem is much larger than Bathsheba and Uriah. My need and my need for mercy is much greater than I could possibly imagine."

Brothers and sisters, I want to apply this to our own hearts in a very particular way this morning. Sometimes we ourselves hear ourselves saying or maybe others saying, "Oh well, we're all sinners." Have you ever heard that even come out of our own mouth? "After all, we're all sinners." Almost said in an off-handed way. We must ask ourselves: have we referenced original sin in some casual way so as to dismiss the heinousness of our sin? Far be it from us to lessen the grievousness of any of our sin with some off-handed remark, "Oh, that's just the way we are. We're all sinners." Oh, let that be far from us. Let us not ever lessen the grievousness of sin as sin.

So brothers and sisters, what we find in our text this morning that the repentant heart is a confessing heart and that confession is perhaps a larger confession than we have at first thought that we needed. It is the bringing of the whole of one's need to the Lord, recognizing and confessing not only my actual sin but in some way also acknowledging that one's need extends even to one's condition. "Lord, have mercy on me, this me that has not only committed actual sins but has a sin problem, a condition of sin. O Lord, have mercy." It not only aggravates the sin all the more to reference it but it incites the soul to come to the Lord in true confession. My sin problem and its deserving condemnation goes far beyond this sin or that sin. My heart is corrupted and even that reality grieves me. "Lord, have mercy. Have mercy." Do you see that?

Now one might say that this whole situation is just not fair. This is just not fair. Why should you and I inherit the guilt and consequences of a sin that you and I did not commit? This is so unfair. Why should we have to inherit guilt and corruption from a sin committed by Adam, sin that we did not personally commit? He's the one that got us into this mess. Why should we have to pay the consequences of his action? Now earlier in this sermon it was said that the matter of our being a sinner is directly tied to our relationship to one man, namely Adam. Brothers and sisters, dear friends, did you not know that the Gospel itself at bottom is God choosing in his infinite mercy to send another man? The Gospel at bottom is God being merciful in sending a second Adam. Another Adam. And just as our fall into sin was dependent on our relationship to a man, our salvation is dependent upon our relationship to another man, the man Christ Jesus where we reap the consequences of actions we never took, where we reap the benefits of a work that we never performed. Oh, the unfairness of grace.

Though the first Adam failed to obey the will of God yielding eternal consequences to all of his family members, the second Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ, successfully obeyed the will of God yielding eternal consequences to all of his family members. Do you see that? The Gospel at bottom is God's choosing in his infinite mercy to send a second Adam and all of those who are part of his family are those who have turned in faith to him, are joined and united to that second Adam just as we were so united to the first, finding in Christ our righteousness, finding in Christ an atoning sacrifice that has borne the full weight of my transgressions – watch it – all of my transgression both original and actual. Isn't that glorious? The second Adam bore the weight of all of our sin, not just the sin that we have actually committed as we came forth from our mother's womb, but he died even for that sin we committed in Adam, our original sin. He bore the full weight of it all. All sin, even the sin you committed by representation.

Isn't that marvelous? And we are safe because of that representative's action. Oh, how unfair! Oh, how gloriously unfair that we who come to Christ in faith receive the benefits that we never earned; we who come to Christ by faith, we receive acceptance that we've never merited; that we who come to Christ by faith, we receive mercy all because of another man's action. That's the Gospel. Oh, the glorious truth of representation. In Adam sinned we all. In Christ we're righteous. In Christ we're sinless because he's borne every sin both original and actual. Oh, what a liberation this gives to the soul, does it not? What liberation.

My fellow sinners, and I use that word not lightly but in all that has been said so far, sinners, my fellow sinners whose need is greater than we can imagine, you need not prepare yourself for mercy. You need not prepare yourself for grace. Come to Christ just as you are. Come to him in all of your filth. Isn't that liberating? You need not clean up. You need not comb your hair, as it were, and dress nicely in your soul. You need not make preparations to be received. Come as you are in all of your filth, in all of your sin. Come to Christ Jesus and rest upon your Savior.

Have you come to him? May I ask, have you ever come to him truly? Christian, are you still coming to him? Still coming to him? Come as you are and cling to the Lamb of God.

Let's pray.

*Our Father in heaven, we thank You that in Jesus Christ we are righteous, that in Jesus Christ we are accepted, that in Jesus Christ we have full and complete salvation. Father, we thank You for the Gospel of the second Adam. O God, You did not have to send a Redeemer but yet You chose to show mercy. The first Adam got us into this mess and, Lord, we confess with hearts of praise the second Adam has got us out of this mess. O Father, let us not think for one moment that we can in our own strength get us out of this mess. Help us, Lord, to cling to Christ and to keep coming to the Lamb of God, coming as we are and even as we daily sin, as we weekly sin, as we keep coming, Lord, help us to keep coming and coming and coming as we are in faith, and finding our rest and our solace and our forgiveness and our peace as we turn with repentant hearts, with confessing hearts, confessing the true depth of our need. O how we thank You for this glorious Gospel that's so unfair, for we know if You were to give us fairness, we would all be condemned. Thank You for Christ. We love You in him. Increase our faith and love all the more, we ask. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.*

People of God, receive now the benediction. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. Amen.