

The Repentant Heart: A Heart Pleading for Restoration and Renewal, 1

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The Repentant Heart
By Brandon Bernard

Bible Text: Psalm 51:7-12
Preached on: Sunday, November 10, 2019

Westminster Presbyterian Church
3701 Jones Creek
Baton Rouge, LA 70816

Website: www.wpcbr.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/wpcbr

Well, let us remain standing and let us open our Bibles to Psalm 51. Psalm 51 as we continue with our series through this Psalm of David and we begin now the third section of Psalm 51 that is found from verses 7 through 12. Our concentration this morning will be on 7, 8 and 9, but let us begin with reading from verse 1 all the way to verse 12. Let us hear God's word.

1 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. 7 Purge
me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than
snow. 8 Make me hear joy and gladness, That the bones You have broken
may rejoice. 9 Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my
iniquities. 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast
spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not
take Your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of Your
salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

Thus ends the reading of God's word this morning from Psalm 51. Let us go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, as we hear these words of repentance, it's our desire that they become our words. Father, it's our desire that our hearts be like David's, convicted, full of confession, turning to You for mercy. Father, we pray that this morning You would do a good work by Your Spirit through this proclamation of Your word in the hearts of all of Your people, and may we, Father, find our own hearts truly repentant because of Your

good work within. We love You and we pray all of this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ with dependence upon the work of Your Spirit. Amen.

You may be seated.

Well, we continue with our consideration of this Psalm of David that gives us much insight into the repentant heart, and as we have been praying, it is to the Lord we look, that as we read this Psalm it not just give us a window into David's repentance and to David's heart of repentance but that it actually become our own, for indeed it is intended to be a model for all of the people of God, indeed it's the congregation that sings this very Psalm.

We've seen so far that the repentant heart is a turning heart towards God and it is one that is a confessing heart. The last few weeks have been spent considering that confession section of Psalm 51, and as we move into this third section of the Psalm which is verses 7 to 12, we find that the repentant heart is a heart that pleads. It pleads for restoration and renewal. Our text this morning, which is a concentration on those first three verses, 7, 8 and 9, it focuses particularly our attention on the subject of restoration.

Well, who is the one that would cry for restoration in the first place? Not everyone would need to cry for restoration but one who is truly broken needs restoration, needs to be restored, and David invokes this language in verse 9 of his bones being broken, hence the theme of restoration in our text this morning. He uses this language elsewhere in the Psalms. This is not the only time that he invokes the language of bones. In Psalm 31, for instance, David himself writes, "My strength fails because of my iniquity and my bones waste away." Then in the very next chapter which is Psalm 32, he writes, "When I kept silent about my sin, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long, for day and night Your hand was heavy upon me." And here in our text we find something similar, don't we? In the context of talking about sin which, of course, the entire chapter 51 concerns that subject, in that context David writes "the bones You have broken," speaking of himself.

Now some say in these passages David is indicating the holistic effects of sin, effects that penetrate even into the body, and anyone who is deeply grieved over anything knows that deep grief can bring about effects on the body because we, indeed, are whole creatures, soul bodies, as it were. Well, the same is true of grieving over sin. Grieving, deep grief over sin can even bring about an effect upon the body, but it can also be spoken of metaphorically to just include the whole person being broken, and if we hear anything reverberating throughout this chapter of Psalm 51, it is a man who is broken in his whole being over his sin. But what's most important to note is that in each of these cases that David uses his bones, it's the Lord who is identified as the one who brings that weight and brings that breaking. "My bones waste away for day and night Your hand was heavy upon me," Psalm 32. And in our passage today, "the bones You have broken." Did you notice that in our reading this morning? "The bones You have broken."

See what David is identifying. There is no interest in a cry for restoration when there is no brokenness, and David is saying, "The Lord has broken me and it's to Him I cry for restoration." No one's gonna cry or even desire restoration if they're not broken. Indeed, that's the beginning of repentance, isn't it, as we've seen when Nathan approached David over his sin, that word that came face-to-face with this man and his heart was broken. David would not cry out for restoration if the Lord had not been kind enough to send Nathan to confront him.

Perhaps we should pause just a moment and just note that we ought to welcome confrontation from God. Our hearts, as hard as it is, should welcome his confronting our sin. Our hearts ought to be sensitive to the conviction of the Holy Spirit that brings to our soul and says, "Thy sin. You're the man. You have sinned against the Lord." Are we thankful when the Lord confronts our heart with our sin as sin in whatever form that may come, in whatever form he approaches and confronts our souls? Are we thankful and see it as a token of his kindness to us, even a token of his mercy that he doesn't leave us in our blindness, he doesn't leave us to think little of our sin or even not to see it as sin at all, which we think that was the case with David? David was just skating on through life as though nothing had happened though he had killed Uriah and had committed adultery with Bathsheba. In God's kindness he was confronted in his sin. His heart was broken and does it produce sorrow? Oh, yes. Deep sorrow. It is disturbing. It is difficult but are we thankful? Doubly so. We ought to be doubly so thankful that the Lord exposes us and doesn't leave us in our blindness, even to the smallest of sins.

May the Lord weigh down heavily upon our souls until, indeed, we turn away from our sin. I would encourage you to make that your prayer. Make that your prayer, "Lord, don't let me feel comfortable with my sin. Don't let me feel comfortable until I've turned to You in repentance." If you are one here this morning very comfortable living in a particular sin or sins, let your cry be this day, "Lord, break me, break my legs in the way in which they are walking. Stop me in my tracks." That's a worthy prayer, isn't it, for all of us concerning any of our sin?

So David turns with a plea to the Lord for restoration. He writes, "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean." Now this word "hyssop" was simply a plant, a hyssop plant. Kids, it's a plant that has leaves that are real furry and even the branches are rather hairy, as it were, and it could be used very much like our modern-day brush, if you were to brush something on a canvas, for instance, or dip it in paint and fling it. It was similar to that in an ancient world. For instance, hyssop was used on the day that God came through Egypt in his wrath, and what did he tell the nation of Israel to do? He told them to take the blood of the Passover lamb, take hyssop, a hyssop plant, and take that blood and apply it on the doorposts of your home so that when the Lord comes through in his wrath, he will pass over you.

It was also used in the inauguration of the Mosaic covenant where we find there in Exodus 24, the Scripture tells us that they took the blood with hyssop and sprinkled it, rather flung it on the people. There hyssop was used again.

It's also used in other ceremonial rituals in applying blood or sprinkling blood to address uncleanness, but most notably, and you need to listen very carefully here, most notably it was used in the cleansing of lepers which David most likely has in mind here, and you'll see it as it unfolds. The law of the leper which we find in the book of Leviticus, tells us about the cleansing ceremony of a leper. A leper was one who was not inside the camp. No, he must be ostracized, placed outside the camp in the colony of the lepers. No way did he have access into the fellowship of God's people the way that he was or she was.

When a leper, however, was reportedly recovered from his leprosy, what would happen at that point is that the priest would go out outside the camp to that reportedly recovered leper and he would engage in a ritual. If he indeed found that the leper was healed, the priest would be required to take two birds and he had to kill one of the birds in an earthen vessel and run water over it. So what you were left with was basically a basin or vessel of blood and water all mixed together and the priest would take hyssop along with the living bird and actually scarlet yarn and cedar wood, and he would dip them down in the blood of that dead bird and then he would take it and he would sprinkle it all over that leper that had been healed, and the Scripture says that priest was then required after sprinkling that blood on that leper, on the healed leper, he was required to say these words, "You shall pronounce him clean." The priest would pronounce him clean.

Now the next step that would take place is that the leper, now healed leper and now made clean leper by the sprinkled blood, would shave all of his hair and then he was required to wash all of his clothes and then engage in a washing of his entire body, and only then would this cleansed and washed leper, former leper, be allowed and granted access back into the camp. And can you imagine the elation of family members and friends as here comes this one who has been ostracized for perhaps years outside the camp, is now allowed back into the community of the faithful, into the community of the people of God, reunited. Oh, what joy and gladness would be heard in the air as the leper is now restored!

Now it's likely that what David is doing here in verse 7 and 8 is he's seeing his sinful condition likened to that of a leper, for where does he start? Look at the text, where does he start? When he calls out to the Lord, he says here in our text, verse 7, "Purge me with," what? "Hyssop." And what will be the result? "I shall be clean." What was it the priest had to say to the leper? "You are clean."

Look at the next verse or the next line rather of verse 7, "Wash me." Wash me. What was the next step in the leper? After the blood was sprinkled and he was pronounced clean, he then was fully washed. And David even goes further and he adds a descriptive touch, as one author put it, by showing how clean that he was made, it was "whiter than snow." That's how clean he was.

Then what happens next? Look at verse 8, "Make me hear," not let me be joyful. Did you notice that? "Let me hear joy and gladness." What is true of the leper as he's granted restoration back into the camp? He hears the joy and the gladness of the camp in elation over his restoration and being brought back in.

So that's why we have here this cry, this plea for restoration. He says, "Purge me with hyssop, I'll be clean. Wash me, I'll be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness." Reunited in fellowship with God and with his people. What imagery. You see the full restoration that David's heart is longing for. He's longing for that level of restoration that that leper experienced. David envisions himself much like the leper who is in a position or a status of uncleanness who needs restoring. He needs to be purged with hyssop. He's like the leper. He needs to be washed. He needs to be restored. Why? So, "That the bones You have broken may rejoice." So that I might rejoice, you see. That's the end of David's heart, the end of it all is that his deep sorrow over his brokenness might be turned into elated joy. "That the bones You've broken, that I'm thankful that You broke, might turn from sorrow to joy."

Just like that leper, can you imagine the smile on the face of that leper coming back into the camp? It's probably one of those kinds of joys and smiles that can't even keep the tears back and that's what David longs for, like the bones you've broken. Rejoice like the leper for the same one who caused my bones to be broken in my whole person over my sin, is the very one who can declare me clean. He's the very one who may restore me to fellowship with the living God himself. Isn't that beautiful?

So we find David ending in verse 9 much the same way he started in verses 1 and 2. He says in verse 9, "Hide Your face from my sins, blot out all my transgressions." In other words, another way of putting this, "Don't look upon my sin but remove it from Your sight." Now children, I know that you are learning a lot of new words in the curriculum that you're going through in Sunday school and that is most important. There was actually a word in our adult Sunday school class this morning that we focused on, and I want to share it with you and it's the word "expiate." It sounds like a mouthful of a word but all that means is to remove something; to take it away. To expiate it, to take it away.

Did you know that the words "blot out" that we find here in our text this morning is the same word that would be used of a scribe who's writing on tablets? He would take the smooth side of his writing instrument and if he made a mistake, he would smear over the tablet to erase that stroke that was once there that now is no longer there, removing it from the account, and in verse 9, that's exactly the concept that David is evoking here. David is essentially calling upon God to remove his sin from God's vision. "Take it away, Lord! Take it out of Your sight! Expiate my sin, O Lord! Turn Your instrument around and erase, take it out of the account! Blot it out!" This is very similar to verse 1, is it not, the way he began. What does he say in verse 1? "Blot out my transgressions." This is real heavy on the heart of David. Very much on his heart. He wants his sins removed.

Now step back just a moment and do you see what David is doing at kind of a macro level here in Psalm 51? He began with his plea for God's mercy to have his status changed, and he ends here in verse 9 with a plea for God's cleansing to have his status changed. That's why you find out, "Blot of my transgressions," at the beginning of Psalm 51, and here at Psalm 51:9 he says the same language almost identically, "Blot out my iniquity. Blot out my transgressions." And what's sandwiched in between that? That

desire for restoration, the beginning of Psalm 51 and here in verse 9, what do you find in between? You find his confession. You see, he sandwiches his confession around these two pleadings for restoration and mercy. He envelops, as it were, his confession with a pleading for forgiveness and mercy, as if it swallows up his confession, if we can put it that way.

Dear brothers and sisters, the repentant heart, it is a confessing heart, and oh, how our prayers should include much of confession. Oh, may it ever be. But it doesn't stop there. A repentant heart doesn't acknowledge the presence of sin and sit in despair, and our hearts have a tendency to want to do that, to mull over our sin, to even wallow in all of its devastating effects, and even confess that to the Lord that, "I have sinned." Let your heart confess truly and deeply what you have, which is sin, but let it be swallowed up with pleadings for what you need. Confess what you have, which is sin, but let it be swallowed up, as it were, with pleadings for what you need. You need restoration by his mercy. How does Psalm 51 start? "Lord, be merciful to me. Have mercy on me." Let that be the strongest echo of your prayer, even swallowing up your confession, as it were, because the reason you're confessing is that you might be restored, right? Call out to him for what you need. "Lord, give me not what I deserve, give me what I need. Lord, my sin is in my sight, my sin is ever before me, but that's not what's paramount. What's paramount is that it's in Your sight and I need it to be removed from Your sight. Blot out my transgressions. Hide Your face from my sin. Yes, Lord, I am a leper. I'm a leper but You can make me clean. I'm a leper, I'm disgusting. My sin that is ever before me is disgusting but You can wash me. You can make this broken sadness turn to gladness. You can bring a final restoration."

How did David see this restoration as coming about? Look again at verse 7, "Purge me with hyssop." This restoration, this cleansing is gonna start right there. That's where the thought has to remain. "Purge me with hyssop." There is one thing that the Scripture almost always associates with hyssop, that hyssop plant, kids, it is the application of blood in relation to sin. It speaks forth mercy through blood. In fact, that should be the first thing that you when you hear hyssop, that's the first thing that should run through your mind. The application of blood in relation to sin. I need blood to be applied to me.

What application of blood does this blood smearing of the hyssop ultimately point to? Our Savior's blood. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins, but with the shed blood of Christ Jesus applied there is full and complete remission of sins. Did you hear that? Complete remission. That's why he says here, he says, "Blot out all of my iniquities." No half measures. And did you know the Lord is not a Lord of half measures when it comes to dealing with your sin? Through Christ Jesus you're made clean, fully clean.

You know, a few years ago, some of you will remember this, kids, maybe you remember this, we had a very strange weather event in Baton Rouge, and one of my children came and said, "Dad, dad, they're predicting snow tonight and I can't wait to wake up and see all of it!" Of course, I had to tell her that when the snow falls in Louisiana, it usually melts as soon as it touches the ground. "Don't get your hopes up." Well, sadly, she went

to bed crying that night. You read in the books and you see pictures of sleds and hills and, oh, the anticipation of a child's mind, right? But the next morning we awoke and, boy, were we not all surprised looking out the window to see what we saw all the way down the street. We've all seen it, haven't we? We've all seen it resting across an entire neighborhood from yard to yard to yard, resting along the roofs on all of the houses, or perhaps you've seen it in an open field. It's truly like a blanket, isn't it? It's like a blanket of whiteness. It's like so pure in its whiteness that it's almost blinding. To the one who truly repents of his sins, her sins, the Lord will make you clean through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ such that you will not be like that white snow, you'll be whiter.

Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, we thank You for this promise that through the shedding of blood, the shedding of Christ's blood there is full and complete remission of sins. And Father, our hearts have a hard time contemplating how clean You can make us through Christ, but we thank You for this imagery that You can make us not just as white as snow but whiter. Oh, how clean! And Father, as we consider our sin and our filthiness and our darkness and our ugliness, this is nothing short of good news, good news to the sinful heart that needs to hear those words, "Clean! Clean! Clean!" And Father, I pray that it would have its effect that David so desired, that the bones that You've broken that I'm thankful You've broken, they'll rejoice with dancing and gladness because of the restoration that's come by Your goodness and Your mercy. O Father, we thank You for so great a salvation that is ours in Jesus Christ, the One whom You have chosen in Your kindness to take the hyssop and apply it to us so that we may be washed and clean and restored. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ, this is not a farewell, this is not a prayer, it is a pronouncement from the throne of heaven to the people of God. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace both now and until that time when Christ comes riding on the clouds in all of His glory and then forever world without end. Amen and amen.