

Psalm 51:1-6 - A Portrait of True Repentance (Part 1)

Introduction: Nearly everyone who is even a little familiar with the Bible knows the historical narrative of David and Bathsheba. David committed adultery with her and she became pregnant. David then tried with all his might and scheming to make it look like the baby was really her husband's - Uriah's. But for all his scheming, he was unable to cover his sin, but instead ended up adding murder to his adultery. Before the child was born, a prophet was sent to David to deliver a powerful rebuke for this folly.

2 Samuel 12:1-31 [1] Then the Lord sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: "There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. [2] The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. [3] But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. [4] And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." [5] So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! [6] And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity." [7] Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. [8] I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! [9] Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. [10] Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' [11] Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. [12] For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.'" [13] So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. [14] However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die." [15] Then Nathan departed to his house.

1. No Hope But in God's Mercy - v1-2

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

Point: There is first a complete and unqualified recognition of being covered in the filth of sin. Recall what David said after being so dramatically confronted by Nathan: "I have sinned against the Lord."

Point 2: Notice here that David's primary concern is his status before God, and *not the temporal judgments pronounced by Nathan against his child and his household:*

⇒ [10] Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me [11] Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. [12] For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.' ... [14] However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to

the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die."

Illustration: One of the great signs that true repentance has been granted to a sinner is this very thing: *an overwhelming need to know that all is well between them and God, their Judge.*

Application: All other concerns are secondary to this one great question - Is God merciful? Will He be merciful to me? Is there a way of escape from His awful wrath and righteous anger me for what I have willfully done?

Application 2: If a person is primarily concerned with the way in which their sin would affect their reputation, their standing in their community, their finances, or anything at all *other* than God, this is not the heart of true repentance.

Application 3: True repentance that reaches out to the mercy of Christ has at its beating heart a *true* love for the beauty and holiness of God - it loves God as He is in Himself, and it is broken-hearted, burdened, and sad at the sight in oneself of that which is heinous and ugly - namely, our sin.

Application 4: True repentance also sees that the only recourse the sinner has, having thoroughly ruined himself, is the mercy of God in Christ.

Application 5: There is no plea of personal merit, apparent misunderstanding of good intentions, etc. There are not half-confessions of sin, there are not partial admissions of guilt, there are not excuse-laden apologies which attempt in any way to dull the sharp edge of *evil* that accompanied the sinful actions.

Point 3: "Have mercy upon me, O God, According to your *lovingkindness...*" - Hebrew: *chesed*.

"Chesed": God's covenant faithfulness. Our only hope of heaven is that God is absolutely faithful to what He promised Abraham, to what He promised Isaac, to what He promised Jacob, David, and the people of Israel through the prophets. When God swore the oath back in Genesis 15 to Abraham - promising to make his descendants as numerous as the stars of the heavens, *it is that covenant that is fulfilled every time a sinner is graciously brought to repented, granted saving faith in Jesus Christ, and washed thoroughly from their sins and pronounced righteous before God.*

Illustration of Chesed in action: Deut. 4:25-31 "When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, and act corruptly and make a carved image in the form of anything, and do evil in the sight of the Lord your God to provoke Him to anger, [26] I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you will soon utterly perish from the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess; you will not prolong your days in it, but will be utterly destroyed. [27] And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you. [28] And there you will serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. [29] But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. [30] When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the Lord your God and obey His voice [31] (for the Lord your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.

Application: When we read about the Lord Jesus carrying His cross up to Mount Calvary, in willingly laying down His life *in behalf of His people's sins*, that is the ***chesed*** of Yahweh in action - and that is our only hope.

Application 2: David knows this - He knows there is absolutely no plea he can make, and no confidence that his life can offer - his only hope is in the covenant faithfulness, the ***chesed*** that His Creator has in Himself. David's only hope is that the one against whom *ultimately* he has committed these horrific sins, would "***have mercy upon me according to your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.***"

⇒ **We see in these words:** *complete abandonment to the mercy of God* - there is no other

shelter, no other recourse, no other words a sinner can utter once he has seen the holiness of God and the filth of his own sin. Mercy!

2. True Confession - v3-4

[3] For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me.

Point: Remember here in Psalm 51 we have a "portrait of true repentance." We have another portrait in Psalm 32 - and this one is very important for all who profess to be true Christians to consider very carefully:

Psalm 32:1-5 A Psalm of David. A Contemplation. Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered. [2] Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit. [3] When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. [4] For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah [5] I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

Application: In v3 of Psalm 51 here - he says he is acknowledging his sin and that it is *always before him*. Remember that for at least 9 months or so, David had apparently put this out of his mind and did not seem to be interested in confessing to it.

Application from our Confession of Faith - chapter 17.3 - Of the perseverance of the

Saints: Nevertheless, they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins;¹ and, for a time, continue therein;² whereby they incur God's displeasure,³ and grieve His Holy Spirit,⁴ come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts;⁵ have their hearts hardened,⁶ and their consciences wounded;⁷ hurt and scandalize others,⁸ and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.⁹ (WCF 17:3 WCS)
⇒ What were the steps that led David down this path? *He neglected his known duties:*

2 Samuel 11:1-2 It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. [2] Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold.

Illustration: About how many of us could it be said that we knowingly stopped doing what we *knew* we ought to do - because life dealt us an unexpected blow, an unforeseen heartache, something that struck a blow to our confidence in God's goodness to us, something we did that embarrassed us, etc... and thus we let go of Him for a time - we abandon church attendance, Bible reading, praying with trusted Christian friends, reading good books, serving in our communities in Christ's name, etc.

Application: My dear friends, let us all remember, that God is more faithful as a loving father than even the best of earthly fathers.

Application 2: What God is teaching me and you when the bottom falls out and we are left raw and broken is that He will carry us if we will but call upon Him. He is near to the broken hearted and he hears their cries and delivers them out of all their troubles. The same man who wrote these broken words of repentance in Psalm 51 also wrote these:

Psalm 34:6-10 This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him, And saved him out of all his troubles. [7] The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, And delivers them. [8] Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him! [9] Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. [10] The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing.

Application: We read this morning from Romans 8: "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, How shall he not also with Him freely give us all things?" *Why are we*

so quick to turn from Him, when we know that even in our darkest and most faithless days He never turns from us? And we must remember that it is because He is so loving that He chastens us - that He will at times remove His hand of restraint and give us a glimpse of how deep our sin truly is, that we might be broken by it and cry out every day henceforth: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness."

Application 2: And if you are at the end of yourself right now and you truly belong to Christ, God is using your pain as a megaphone to call you back to Himself - as He knows and is reminding you that the only safety and peace you will ever know is found in His gracious, loving, and forgiving arms.

Application 3: Often for a time - like David's 9 months - the sin is pushed back, compartmentalized, and an attempt is made to go on without acknowledging it... but eventually, God will break us until v4 becomes our own:

[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.

Point: To "confess" is to "speak the same thing" - to agree with the judgment of God against us, that we are in the wrong, that He is right, and that we have no excuse - and that we are filthy and undone. As much as all of us want to be honorable, godly, and have integrity - true repentance requires us to admit to the evil *intentions* that lie behind so much of what we are and do. Remember those sobering words from the repentant thief hanging in agony on the cross to the other thief who was mocking the Lord Jesus:

Luke 23:40-41 ... "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? [41] And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong."

Illustration: And there is *shame* that goes with this. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed... but after they sinned, when they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden, *they were afraid and hid themselves.*

Point 2: Let us all recall that at the end of the grand week of creation, God pronounced all things good. And the Word of God teaches us that Adam was good and upright - he was created in the image and likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness - and Adam *and all of us in Him* turn our backs upon God and *embraced evil.* And now *evil* is what we do.

Application: And it is the evil that is in our hearts and actions *that must come to our attention and which we must acknowledge before the face of God.*

Application 2: Yes, we do sin against one another, but all sin is primarily an offense against God Himself.

Commentator Matthew Poole's beautiful exposition of verse 4:

So the sense is this. Though I have sinned against my own body and conscience, and against others; yet nothing is more grievous and terrible to me, than to consider that I have sinned against thee; partly upon a general account, because this is the chief malignity and sinfulness of sin, that it offends and injures the glorious and blessed God; and partly upon particular reasons, because I set thee at defiance, and having used all wicked arts to conceal my sins from men, and being free from fear of punishment from them, I went on boldly in sin, casting off all reverence to thy holy and omniscient Majesty, and all dread of thy judgments, and because I sinned against thee, to whom I had such numerous and peculiar and eminent obligations, as thy prophet Nathan truly suggested to me:

2 Samuel 12:7-8 ... I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. [8] I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more!

Application: And what could God through a prophet say to each one of us? "I gave you your life, I have provided nourishment for you all your days, I gave you vaccinations against diseases

as a small child, a warm and dry place to sleep nearly every night of your life, stacks of Bibles and great books, a family that wanted you and took care of you.... and you defiantly sin against me?"

Final Application of pt 2: And it is this defiance of God's holiness that all of us must *confess* - and which is at the very *heart* of the portrait of true repentance.

3. God's Desire for Truth in Our Hidden Parts - v5-6

[5] Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

Point: He we have David confession of the pervasiveness of his sin - it has been *who he is* from *conception*. Our rebellion flows from our solidarity with Adam, our federal head - and we walk in his sinful footsteps of defiance, rebellion, and evil toward God and man. But repentance from that evil toward God and man is characterized by v6:

[6] Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.

Point: The restoration of the knowledge, righteousness, and holiness is likewise at the heart of true repentance. We are not content to look merely outwardly righteous, outwardly obedient, outwardly spiritual - but our heart-longing is "truth in the inward parts... and to know wisdom."

⇒ We desire truth in the inner part of who we are - to sincerely desire holiness because holiness is beautiful. We desire to truly worship God faithfully because praise is beautiful. When the truly repentant person remembers their sin, they long to be delivered from it. When the truly repentant person considers how much they have offended God by their sin, they long to do that which is pleasing and right in His holy eyes - they long to praise Him!

Psalm 33:1 "Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful."

A quest for sincerity from the heart toward God and others - a longing for true holiness - an overwhelming desire to return to the service of our Creator for which He created us in the first place - that is what burns in the heart of the truly repentant.

In conclusion, hear the words of:

2 Cor. 7:8-11 For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. [9] Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. [10] For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. [11] **For observe this very thing [and I would encourage myself and you, when we sin, to likewise consider this very thing as well], that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.**

[6] Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.

1. No Hope But in God's Mercy - v1-2; 2. True Confession - v3-4; 3. God's Desire for Truth in Our Hidden Parts - v5-6

Jude 1:24-25 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, [25] To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.