

# The Repentant Heart: Its Beginning

*The Repentant Heart*

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**Bible Text:** 2 Samuel 12:1-9; Psalm 51  
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Let us remain standing this morning and let us open God's word to the book of 2 Samuel, our text this morning picks up right where we left off in our public reading this morning. You'll find that on page 477 in the pew Bible if you're using that. 2 Samuel 12:1-9 is our text this morning. I'd like for you, however, to keep your finger there in 2 Samuel 12 and I want you to turn over, if you would please, to the book of Psalms, Psalm 51. We will begin with a reading from Psalm 51 and then we will go to our text this morning in 2 Samuel 12.

People of God, let us hear the word of our God. 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.

Now 2 Samuel 12:1,

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.

Thus ends the reading of God's word.

Let us go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father in heaven, we acknowledge that Your word is life, it is living, it is active, and sharper than any two-edged sword. Our Father, we humble ourselves under Your word and we ask that by Your Spirit You would take it and drive it deep. Do a good work in our hearts and lift our faith to see Thee and the beauty of Your grace. For we pray all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

You may be seated.

There is perhaps little that is more complex than the human heart. Of course, I'm not speaking of the organ that is pumping within our chest. No, the heart about which I'm speaking is much more complex than that, comparatively the organ in our chest is like a children's 10 piece puzzle, indeed the heart of man about which the Scripture speaks is far far more complex. Attempting to understand the heart of a person is like peeling an onion, as soon as you think you have a grasp of some level of understanding of one aspect of man's heart, you find that you've really only peeled off one little layer, one of many many many layers.

Lately we've been considering in evening worship the two aspects of our make-up as human beings. There is the inner immaterial aspect of our being and there is the outer material aspect of our beings. Now science is always about discovering the intricacies of our material make-up but what's interesting is that the Scripture isn't really that concerned with explaining the complex intricacies of the inner aspect of our being, rather Scripture's focus is much more on the condition of the inner immaterial aspect of one's being and what it looks like when a heart is of a particular condition.

The Scripture provides us what the condition of the heart looks like when it is repentant, and there perhaps is no better and no clearer text in all of Scripture that provides such insight than the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm, and it's for this reason that in the weeks to come, you and I will be carefully walking our way through a sermon series on Psalm 51 entitled "The Repentant Heart." In fact, this Psalm is often referred to as the Psalm of repentance. It serves to dissect the whole of the matter of repentance.

Children, you may have or if you haven't yet, you may soon be engaged in dissecting an animal, perhaps like a frog was many of our experiences in the past. And what do you do? You cut open the animal, you open it up and you pin it down, why do you do that? For what purpose? It's so that you may see things that are going on inside of the animal that you would not be able to discover otherwise. Psalm 51 provides us an anatomy

lesson likened to a dissection but it's dissecting the heart of one who's repentant that we get in and see what is on the inside that's going on. The subject of repentance is one that should be for each of us a matter of very high interest because it's one of those subjects that the Scripture makes a very big deal about. It's a vital matter.

There was a man who preceded Jesus whose name was John. We often will refer to him as John the Baptizer because his ministry was so associated with his baptizing in the wilderness, and the Scripture says about this John, he appeared baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. That lay at the heart of John the Baptist's ministry.

Well, what about Jesus? After Jesus' baptism, Jesus then launches into his public ministry, that's what his baptism does. His public ministry begins after his baptism and immediately we find these words, "Jesus then began to preach saying, 'Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" It wasn't his closing words, it was his very first word.

Then we come to the Apostle Paul whom the Scripture says, "He went about testifying to both Jews and Greeks alike repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ." This characterized the whole of the ministry of Paul.

Then we have the Apostle Peter who preached the very first sermon after Pentecost. It's the first sermon after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and when he stands and delivers his sermon, right there after there are people who are cut to the heart and what do they cry out? "What shall we do?" And hear Peter's first word, "Repent." You see, the subject before us should be of great interest to our souls.

In seminary, one of the first classes that one takes is a course called Academic Theological Writing, and one of the important principles that set forth in that course is that one must be very very careful when one chooses to cite a tertiary source. Tertiary simply means "of third rank." It's number three in a line of three. We think of primary sources, of course we all know what a primary source is, it is that which provides information in the raw, doesn't it, much like an autobiography. A secondary source provides you a description or explanation, perhaps even an analysis of the primary sources much like a biography. But a tertiary source is the third, and it's one that summarizes or even repackages ideas like Wikipedia or a pamphlet. It's not that substantive, it is something that may be questionably reliable as a source of information and you'd better take great care if you're going to cite it, indeed it might be wise to not use it at all, especially as the foundation of an argument.

Tertiary has also come to be used in relation to issues. There may be issues of primary importance, there may be issues of secondary important, but then there also may be issues of tertiary importance, something that is of last concern. Loved ones, you and I must be aware that the subject of repentance that is before us and will be before us in the weeks to come, is in our day a tertiary issue. That's what it's become. One that certainly is not of primary concern and nor is it one really of secondary concern. It is a matter worth giving

our consideration and attention, ah, from time to time, merely touch on it or use the word, or maybe not even give it any consideration at all.

How often do we hear people talking about this subject? It's not a matter that ought to be central to our thinking or central to our conversation or central to our lives. Inspiring stories? Yes, give me more of them. Moral lessons? Yes, give me more of those. Repentance? Not so much. We must also be aware that the subject of repentance is one which our adversary would not want us to give much attention to. It's important to keep that in mind.

Repentance. It is not a tertiary issue. It's a vital issue not only for one who is unconverted and doesn't even know the Lord, yes, it is very very important to you if that is the case, but it is also for the believer, the convert who like David who wrote this Psalm, knows God. It's of high importance to us, brothers and sisters, and the closer we examine David's heart in this text, we come closer to examining our own heart and in turn we come closer to examining the God of David who forgave him, and to him whom we want to know and the one that we want to know better. That's where this takes us. Oh, how we need, desperately need Psalm 51.

Well, having provided that introduction to our series to come, where does the repentant heart all begin? Now you might think, "Well, sure, it starts at Psalm 51:1, doesn't it?" Actually it really begins with the superscription of Psalm 51 which is what we read this morning. It leads us back to 2 Samuel 11 and 12. Chapter 11 was read for us this morning publicly and we just read chapter 12, verses 1 to 9. And it is what takes place here in 2 Samuel that gives rise to Psalm 51.

In 2 Samuel 11, we are provided an account here where David is no longer a little shepherd boy, he's the king over all of Israel and Judah. He has everything. David is on the roof of the king's house, probably a palace-like structure, and he looks down at a woman named Bathsheba who is married to another man, and David desires to have her for himself. His act leads to Bathsheba carrying King David's baby, which then leads to David's ensuring that Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, gets taken out, killed. He sees, he desires, he acts which leads to another action and then yet another action, and things start getting complex real fast.

2 Samuel 11 ends with some tragic words. It says, "But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD." Now it's very interesting that that sentence begins with the word "but, but the thing that David had done displeased the LORD." What is it that he's contrasting? He's contrasting David's heart with God's heart. David's going on about business as usual without a flinch. He tells the messenger, "Go encourage Joab to carry on with the war and the battle," without any hiccups. We're told that after Bathsheba mourned the death of her husband, "David sent and brought her to his house and she became his wife and bore a son." David hadn't flinched. That's where David's heart was, without grief, without trouble, but, but, you see, but then we're told about the Lord's heart. But the Lord was grieved and very displeased with what David had done.

So the Lord confronts David and he confronts David by sending his word, his prophet, the prophet Nathan, and Nathan comes before David and he brings a parable of all things. It's a very simple parable. It's about a rich man and a poor man. So he begins to tell David this parable. There was a rich man who had everything, everything that he wants, everything that he needs, many flocks, many herds. Then there was a poor man who has nothing except one little ewe lamb. Children, that's a female lamb. He had a little female lamb. But the parable spends a lot of time talking about this lamb in relation to this man. The poor man who didn't have much spent his money on getting a lamb for the family, and he raised this little female lamb, and he nourished this little female lamb, and this lamb became older and it grew up with him, it grew up with his kids, his kids probably had a name for it, loving it like you would your own domesticated pet. The children adored it, for sure. But the parable goes on and it says that the lamb drank from the poor man's cup, and the lamb ate from the poor man's food. This man's feeding this lamb. But then the parable goes on even further, it gets more descriptive, it says that he would lay in his bosom. He not only nourished it but he showed this lamb great affection, loved this lamb. But then the parable goes on even further and it says it was like a daughter to him. That level of affection. What a description of an endearing relationship.

Then the rich man who had everything and then some, he took this poor man's little lamb and he put it above the fire and he roasted it all so that he could feed his guest that had traveled to him, and the Scripture actually makes the point that he was unwilling to take an animal from his own flock and his own herd. You know, just reading this story enrages our hearts, doesn't it, and that's exactly what happened to David on that day. He became enraged and he said to Nathan the prophet, "This man had no pity. He deserves to die. And the poor man shouldn't get one lamb back, he should get four lambs back."

Then Nathan looked deep into the eyes of King David and he said to King David, "You are the man." For those of us that are familiar and grew up with it in the old English, "Thou art the man. It's you that I've been talking about all along, David. You're the one who has it all, many wives, many servants, yet you took from another man one that he loved, that he treasured, one that he adored." What is more, David not only deprived Uriah of his spouse, he even deprived Uriah of his own life. "You are the man, David."

Open your Bibles to Isaiah 5. Isaiah 5. Isaiah 5, we find the prophet Isaiah delivering a curse upon the nation of Judah and he uses the language of curse, the language of curse is w-o-e, woe. And I want us to look at Isaiah 5 and I want you to see that Isaiah, if I can just put it in this kind of language, he's woeing everybody in town. Verse 8, "Woe to those." Look at verse 11, "Woe to those." Verse 18, "Woe to those." Verse 20, "Woe to those." Verse 21, "Woe to those." Verse 22, "Woe to men." And now turn the page to chapter 6, verse 5, "Woe is me." What happened between the end of chapter 5 and verse 5 of chapter 6? Isaiah found himself in the presence of Almighty God and he saw himself for who he was, he saw his sin for what it was, such that he cries out, "for I am undone! And I am a man of unclean lips." Isaiah's attention changed so that he said, "I am the one who deserves the woe."

Brothers and sisters, this is the one point that I pray that our hearts will absorb this day. One point this morning: what constitutes the beginning of repentance? Is the shift from the second person and the third person to the first person? That is the beginnings of repentance, it's when your heart is unveiled and your concern moves from you and you and them and them, to, "I am exposed. I am the one who has sinned and I'm the one that needs to turn. Not him and not her."

Now turn to Psalm 51. I know that this is going to sound very redundant, brothers and sisters, but we need this morning to feel the effect. Look at Psalm 51 and I want us to see what has happened to this man David who was confronted with his own sin. Verse 1, me, my. Verse 2, me, me, my. Verse 3, I, my, me. Verse 4, I. Verse 5, I, my, me. Verse 6, me. Verse 7, me, I, me, I. Verse 8, me. Verse 9, my, my. Verse 10, me, me. Verse 11, me, me. Verse 12, me, me. Verse 13, I. Verse 14, me, my. Verse 15, my, my. Verse 16, I. Do you hear the linkage between 2 Samuel 12 and Psalm 51? Do you hear what is the beginnings of a repentant heart? It is a personal conviction of one's own sin without reference to anyone else's.

It's so hard for us, isn't it? Indeed it's hard. It is divine exposure. Oh, how gracious. It's divine exposure. This is the Spirit of God cutting through the second persons, cutting through the third persons with references to you and they, and he gets to the heart and addresses your heart and says, "Thou art the man." It's you that's exposed. Does this resonate with you for this is the beginnings of real repentance? But there's an important clarification we have to make. Very important. Personal conviction is necessary for true repentance but personal conviction is not itself repentance. That's an important caveat, isn't it? It is possible to be confronted with your sin as sin but there not be a turning away from it.

But what is Psalm 51 an account of? Brothers and sisters, Psalm 51 is an account of one who's not only exposed and confronted concerning his sin but it is an account of one who's turning away from it, you see? It's the great turning Psalm, not just a conviction Psalm. But listen well: you will not have a Psalm 51 without a 2 Samuel 12. You won't. Psalm 51 will not resonate with your heart if 2 Samuel 12 doesn't resonate with your heart.

If you have been looking out there which our hearts are so prone to do, identifying everybody else's guilt, where everybody else has been wrong, mixed up in sin and saying, "Woe to those. Woe to those. And woe to those. And woe to those." Please hear this important word this morning that the beginnings of repentance is seeing your own sin for what it is and crying out, "Oh, woe is me!" And not only that, but turn from it and allow your heart to reflect the precious repentant words of Psalm 51.

Loved ones, earlier in this sermon it was mentioned that we must be aware that the subject of repentance is one that our adversary does not want us to give attention to, and why is that? Why is it that our adversary doesn't want us to give attention to it? It is because – watch this – it's because real repentance leads us and becomes intertwined with the blessed matters of mercy and the blessed matters of grace and forgiveness and

freedom which can only be found at the cross. That's why. And Satan does not want us anywhere near the cross. Do you see that? Know that we battle with unseen forces that militate even against our reading Psalm 51 regarding repentance, much less hearing about it. But oh, how our souls need to hear much of it, wouldn't you agree? Oh, what a subject. Repentance, what a subject that brings pause but what a subject that brings joy. Oh, what a subject that brings us a broken heart. But oh, what a subject that brings us a mended heart and a free heart. Oh, what a subject that brings us to careful examination of the soul. But oh, what a subject that brings us to a careful examination of the cross.

It's there that we find the God-man who's innocent in all of his ways, without the slightest imperfection. But why did he die? Whose sin put him on that cross? May I put it this way: thou art the man. Thou art the man. It's our sin that nailed him to the tree. It's our sin that caused him pain.

"Was it for crimes that I had done  
He groaned upon the tree?  
Amazing pity! grace unknown!  
And love beyond degree!

Died He for me, who caused His pain?  
For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! how can it be  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?"

Thou art the man. What terrible words to hear that my sins nailed him to the tree, but what glorious words to hear that my sins were nailed to the tree. Every one of them. The most vile and grossest of them were nailed to the tree.

Satan would have us nowhere near the tree but that's exactly where God would have us be, brothers and sisters. It is beneath the cross of Jesus that we find our rest. It's beneath the cross of Jesus that we find all the reasons in the world to turn from sin and embrace him by faith. May that be where Psalm 51 leads us. By God's grace, may 2 Samuel 12 resonate with our souls. Then may by God's grace, Psalm 51 resonate with all of our souls.

Let's pray.

*Our Father in heaven, we need the beginning of repentance by Your Spirit cutting through our third persons and our second persons and exposing our own hearts to our sin. O Father, we pray that just as Your Spirit indeed calls out to us, "Thou art the man," our Father, we pray that You by Your Spirit would cause us to have a real turn, a real turn from our sin and may by Your Spirit we find ourselves beneath the cross where there is forgiveness of every sin and where there is true rest, true rest for the weary soul. We glory in that cross of Your Son. May, Father, You bless this series to Your glory as we consider Psalm 51, and may You every week, every week lead us to our Savior. It's in His name we pray. Amen.*