

The Repentant Heart: a Turning Heart, Part 1

The Repentant Heart

By Brandon Bernard

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Westminster Presbyterian Church

3701 Jones Creek
Baton Rouge, LA 70816

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

Brothers and sisters, let us remain standing as we open the word that is living and active and let us open to Psalm 51. Psalm 51. If you're using the pew Bible, you'll find that on page 869. Psalm 51 as we continue our series on this Psalm and we consider now the very first section of the Psalm that's found in verses 1 and 2 which actually will continue to be our concentration next week as well.

Let us hear God's word from Psalm 51:1-2. This is the word of the Lord.

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.

Thus ends the reading of God's word.

Let us pray for his illumination this morning.

Our Father in heaven, You know our hearts, You know them far better than we and, Father, as we come submitting ourselves to Your word, we ask that You would apply Your word to our hearts. And Father, we pray that You would indeed expose, that You indeed would come and do a work of grace that yields true repentance in our hearts. And Father, we pray that You would give us a clearer sight of You and ultimately of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ this morning. Father, do Your good work by Your Spirit, we pray, and we pray it in Christ's name. Amen.

You may be seated.

Before us this morning and shall be in the weeks to come, is what is often referred to as the Psalm of repentance, a place where you can go to answer the inquiry of your heart: what is repentance? What does a repentant heart look like? More importantly, am I repenting? A Psalm wherein we find a dissection of a human heart that allows us to see what's going on on the inside of the heart that truly is repentant. Indeed, we are interested

in that very thing, are we not? True repentance. We're going to be finding in the weeks to come there is a difference between true repentance and false repentance. Our interest is in true repentance as we have dissected for us here in Psalm 51 and it's for that reason that the title of our whole series of this Psalm is entitled "The Repentant Heart."

As we saw this past week, we begin this series with a consideration of the superscript that's provided for us in Psalm 51 and that superscript provides us the context that gave rise to the penning of this Psalm by David through the inspiration of the Spirit, and that superscript points us to 2 Samuel 11 and 12 which we considered last week, where we have the prophet Nathan bringing the word of God in confronting David when in his sin. And as we examined 2 Samuel 12, we discovered what constitutes the beginning of this whole thing, the beginning of repentance.

Now while not to be confused with repentance itself, the beginning is the word of God cutting through our second persons, cutting through our third persons and second persons so as to render us in a position of the first person saying, "Woe is me!" Me. Not him or her or them. Indeed, repentance begins with the word of God exposing our hearts in such a way that mirrors these penetrating words of Nathan to David when he says, "David, thou art the man. Thou art the man."

Well, the question before us this morning is: what then? What then? When the Spirit of God comes and exposes your heart, what do you do with your sin? I ask you and I that this morning: what do you do with your sin? When conviction of sin sets in, what will you do with it? What should you do with it? If we're truly repentant, what will that actually look like? Thanks be to God that we are given Psalm 51 to help us and, in fact, we're given much just in the first phrase, "Have mercy upon me, O God. Have mercy upon me, O God." We need to take great care, brothers and sisters, that our familiarity with this Psalm doesn't make us susceptible to missing some of the most obvious and most fundamental features of repentance that screams out to us even in this first phrase. Don't let your familiarity with it allow you to skip along because what we're going to find this morning is some of the most fundamental elements of repentance that's found in six words. Let us carefully consider those elements of those six words, "Have mercy upon me, O God."

Well, back in 2 Samuel 11, we have recorded for us that King David had lusted in his heart that led to committing adultery with Bathsheba, and then having her husband, Uriah, murdered. And after that, David then takes Bathsheba to be his wife and if you recall as that chapter closed out, we found that David was just simply going about business as usual. We found him uninterrupted. He had sinned and sinned greatly. His heart had committed a most grievous sin on top of sin but we found David to be carefree. He had no care for his sin and he had no care for the heart of his God. He was walking on a path not toward but away from the Lord but then in 2 Samuel 12, Nathan the prophet comes and brings the word of the Lord to David and in 2 Samuel 12, in that passage we find that it's all about exposure, it's all about confrontation, it's all about those penetrating words of conviction to David by Nathan, and this exposure and this confrontation caused King David to stop in his tracks.

So what then? What do we see about the heart of David in Psalm 51? Well, let us for a moment take the word "repent" or the word "repentance" which we're going to be talking a lot about over the coming weeks. The word "repent" or "repentance" as used in the New Testament is translated of the Greek word "metanoia." You may have even heard the word "metanoia" or seen it referenced in a book. It's the word for "repentance" in the New Testament and "metanoia" is just simply a word that means "after one's thinking; or after one's mind." It's literally an afterthought, is what it is, which is the direction of one's thought now that is different from the direction of one's thought that was former. My thought now, the afterthought, is completely different than my former thought. So it is to move from one direction of thought to a completely different direction of thought, and that direction is from an arrow that points in one direction that now points completely in the opposite direction. It's not a change of course that goes from this direction and then slightly upward, it's completely an arrow pointing at 180, therefore it's a turn.

This is exactly what we find in David. His former mind was set up on loosely seeking after the desires of his eyes without reference to God. His former mind was set up on allowing his lusts to run their course so as to get what he wanted for the moment without reference to God. His former mind was set up on his greed for ridding himself of anything that would get in his way of what he wanted without reference to God. But in Psalm 51, we find a turn in the mind and the heart of David when he says, "Have mercy upon me, O God." Indeed, we find the whole Psalm of Psalm 51 as characterized by a man whose heart is turning. The whole Psalm is characterized by that element.

Brothers and sisters, what we find at the outset of this Psalm that we don't want to miss is that repentance involves the element of movement. Movement. A turning movement because, you see, one way to respond to exposure, one way to respond to conviction is to have no movement at all. The Psalmist later says, "When I kept silent about my sin, my bones wasted away." You see, it's possible to remain silent, to remain still, to remain unmoved which is exactly the state we found David in before Nathan showed up.

And one may give any number of reasons for not moving but it still amounts to no movement. One might say, "Oh, I'm just trying to figure things out," which is just code word for, "I am not ready to move." Or, "I need to think things through a bit more and work out things on my own," while one is wallowing in their sin, which is just code for, "I am not ready to turn. I'm not ready to move." Or, "I need to take a step back and I need to kind of reevaluate things and I need to reassess my life," which is only to say in many ways, "I would rather delay movement away from my sin or this pattern of sin or this lifestyle." You see, regardless of what label is crocheted on the pillow, it still is but a pillow on which one finds a comfortable place for sin to lie no matter what label you give it. It's simply allows one to remain unmoved in their heart.

Or maybe it's a pet sin. Maybe it's a pet sin. You say, "This pet sin doesn't hurt anything. It is but just a small sin. It's not even really a big sin. It's a little thing. Surely it can't be much of a danger to me. I'll allow my heart to remain right where it is for right now and I'll continue to pet it." To use the analogy of last Sunday evening regarding lust, it's like

letting a most venomous coral snake in your house and saying, "Ah, it's just a little thing. It's only about that long and it's absolutely beautiful too. It's not gonna hurt anything." But you see, that doesn't mirror, brothers and sisters, what we find the repentant heart to look like at its most fundamental level.

The heart we find in Psalm 51 is a heart that is not comfortable with sin, giving it a pillow on which to rest. The heart we find in Psalm 51 is a heart of movement. The heart we find in Psalm 51 is a turning heart. It's a turning heart. It turns away from sin, not towards it. It doesn't hold on to sin, it quickly releases it knowing its danger.

Brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord has saved you, he saved you by the blood of his Son not in order that you may sin, not in order that you may have a good excuse to sin, but in order that you may flee from it. The heart that doesn't really turn is a heart that's not repentant and repentance is what we need in our life, isn't it? Psalm 51, you see, peels back the skin of the heart to show us what the repentant heart looks like and the first thing we have to note is that it's a turning heart, a real turning movement away from sin. That's fundamental.

But we find that this matter of repentance is not just turning away from sin, this turning movement is not only a movement away but it's actually a movement toward. David says, "Have mercy upon me, O God." Before going any further, let's just note first that movement toward is not a movement toward anything and there are many that confuse this matter of movement with the wrong thing. You see, it's not just movement toward anything, it's not a mere change of mind and that's all it is, it's just a mere change of mind, "Well, that didn't work out too well for me. I need to try a different direction now." Don't confuse that with repentance. It's not turning from immorality toward morality. "You know, I really screwed things up with my life, so now I'm just gonna try to do better next time and not screw things up the next go-around." It's not turning just to anything. It's not turning toward "forgiving yourself." "Well, there's no sense in dwelling on this too long and feeling too sorry for myself because, after all, everybody makes mistakes." That's not repentance. That's just turning to something else. It's not a turning even to mystic spirituality and meditation to rid one's mind of the thought of labeling this activity in my life as sin. It's not turning to some generic religion that provides religious exercises and religious activities to make me feel better about the sin that I've committed.

You see, it is possible for one to have movement but it to be movement towards anything but God, so we need to note from the outset when we're talking about the repentant heart, having a turning movement, it's not just a turning movement to anything. What will you do with your sin? What does David teach us to be fundamental in dealing with our sin? It's not turning away from sin toward anything, it's turning away from sin toward God. Fundamental. "Have mercy upon me, O God." We find from the outset of this Psalm where David turns with his sin and it's not repentance if it's not turning towards God. It might be something, give it whatever label one wills, but don't give it the label repentance if it's not turning toward God. That's fundamental.

What defined David's sin in part was engaging in his wants and his desires without reference to God, you see. His face, as it were, was turned away from God. That was his problem. David's eyes that once were focused upon God, his pleasure, his will, his glory, his desires, his joy, were set now upon David's will and David's desire and David's joy and David's longing. But what do we find here in Psalm 51 about David? We find him turning toward God and that turning movement is in only one direction, one direction and that's toward God.

You know, when one approaches Psalm 51, I struggled with this homiletically actually, where to start this series because I'll tell you, I wanted to start with the second paragraph and not the first. When you approach Psalm 51, you might actually expect to find the second paragraph first and do you know what you find in the second paragraph? His confession. You find David's confession of sin. You might expect to find that a repentant heart would start first by confessing sin, right? But we don't find that to be the case in Psalm 51, interestingly enough. It's interesting that David formulates this Psalm of repentance by beginning with, "Have mercy upon me, O God."

Brothers and sisters, what we have highlighted for us about what is true repentance is that it involves its corollary, and repentance, its corollary is spelled f-a-i-t-h. True repentance is not exercised in a compartment all by itself but real repentance is interwoven with real faith. You want to know why? It's because they're the same movement. They're the same movement.

If you and I had a swivel chair up here and you were facing the wall in front of you and you began to swivel so as to face the wall behind you, your movement away from the one wall and your movement towards the other wall is the same movement. It's one movement. You can't have one without the other. You can't turn from one without turning toward the other, and you can't turn toward the other without turning away from the one in front of you. You cannot have true repentance without true faith and you cannot have true faith without true repentance because they are two aspects of the same movement. That's why they're interwoven.

And here we find in Psalm 51:1, we find a man whose heart is broken over his sin and he's turning from it with true repentance, and the only thing toward which true repentance turns in faith is to God, you see? But the heart that turns toward God with real faith issues something from it and that which faith issues forth is a cry, and that cry of faith is what? It's one thing, "Mercy! Mercy!" Real faith is a real turning from sin and a real turning from sin is a turning in faith, and that faith gives expression with a cry, and that cry says, "Have mercy on me, O God, to whom I have turned in faith!" Do you see that? "Have mercy upon me, O God." The repentant heart that turns to God in faith is the heart that's running to God for mercy. For mercy.

Brothers and sisters, where do we find God's mercy? We find that in the one who is not only David's son but the one who is David's Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ. That one who took upon himself all of our sin, bore it all. The one through whom we have peace with God. The one through whom we have received our seal.

You know, last week I mentioned to you Satan doesn't like us dealing with the subject of repentance and the reason why is because real repentance leads you to one place and that's the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Psalm 51 doesn't lead us to David, it leads us to David's Lord where we find the forgiveness of sins in the same place that David found forgiveness of sins. The cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, where we find in Christ favor and not wrath, where we find ourselves to be children and not enemies of God, where we find mercy.

It's no wonder that the Scripture that summarizes Paul's ministry says this, "He went about testifying to both Jews and Greeks repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ." That's the summary of the Apostle Paul's ministry, is a proclamation about those two elements, repentance toward God, a turning from sin toward God. But what else? Faith in Jesus Christ. The same movement with both aspects.

What will you do with your sin? Will you remain in it with no turning movement? Oh, I beg you not. Or will you turn to the Lord with faith in Jesus Christ his Son and find this very day rest? Rest. Repentance, it's a turning movement. Repentance, it's a turning movement toward God. Repentance, it's a turning movement toward God in faith crying out for mercy.

Turn to the Lord in faith today, dear loved ones. Plead his mercy in Christ because do you know what? What we have before us in approximately the center of your Bible that we have opened today, is not a journal entry from King David. It is a Psalm of David but it's not a journal entry. We don't have an autobiography. This is a Psalm. It is intended for the congregation of God to take these words as our own, you see, to take these inspired words as expressions of our own hearts that are repentant and have faith. So may we cry out with conviction, may Psalm 51 be our Psalm that we sing and may it start this way, "Have mercy upon me, O God," turning from sin unto God and pleading his mercy by faith through Jesus Christ. And do you know what you're going to find, dear loved one? And I'll close with this, you're going to find that as you repent and as you turn in faith through Christ, you'll find that the Lord is not reluctant to show mercy, you'll not find the Lord indifferent about showing mercy, and you certainly will not find the Lord withholding mercy. You will find him with a single disposition standing not only ready and willing but with a disposition of delight for he is a God who delights, delights, his greatest delight is to show mercy, to give mercy to the one who calls out, "Have mercy upon me, O God," cries out for mercy through faith in Jesus Christ and the Lord delights to give mercy through him.

Let's pray.

Father, we pray that these elements of repentance that we find at the outset of Psalm 51, we pray, Father, they would all the more stir us to run to You, to run away from sin to You with the cry of faith, crying unto no one else and nowhere else but crying unto Thee alone, "Have mercy." And O Father, what causes our hearts to so run to You is that we know that You are a God who is merciful and delights to show mercy to the repentant.

We thank You that You have turned away none. Father, help us to do with our sin what You have taught us at the outset of this Psalm to do with our sin. Help us not, Father, to wallow in it or to pet it or to find a comfortable place for it. Father, help us to see it for what it is and to turn from it and to turn toward You in faith. Father, we love You and we pray all of these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, church of the Lord Jesus Christ, look up and receive the blessing from on high from a God who is merciful. 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 forevermore. Amen and amen.