

**Conformed to the Image of Jesus
The Gift of Repentance
Psalm 51**

If I were to ask you for your list of the top ten gifts that God has given to his people, what would make your cut? Number one would be Jesus, I imagine, then the Holy Spirit. Salvation would likely be high on your list. How about God’s Word or the gospel? You might include mission or spiritual gifts – you get the idea. I wonder how many would find a place on their list for the gift of repentance? Acts 11:18 and 2 Timothy 2:25 both indicate that repentance is a gift.

The first of Martin Luther’s 95 theses says, “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” The first words that launched the Protestant Reformation spoke of continual repentance for the Christian. Have you ever thought of repentance as a gift? Most of us think of repentance as something we do to gain God’s favor, but a gift? There is something in most all of us that wants to confess our wrongdoing. We see it being played out every day in our land, but we must make sure our confession is driven by the conviction of the Holy Spirit and not a self-serving gesture to be culturally approved. I am not belittling the power of confession – I am encouraging you to make sure that your repentance is biblically directed.

The theme for this summer’s sermons is “Conformed to the Image of God’s Son, Jesus,” taken from Romans 8:29. Ricky Lee and Jeff Kelly have delivered excellent sermons and we all anticipate David Calvert preaching next Sunday. Then the same rotation will begin again, Lord willing. I will be preaching every other week.

There are multiple ways that God transforms us into the image of his Son, and repentance of our sins is a key component of our walk

with Jesus. Since the Bible is telling one story in two parts rather than two separate stories, it is appropriate that we look to Psalm 51 this morning as a guide for the practice of repentance.

Some of you will know the cause of King David's deep and anguished confession to the Lord in this Psalm. This man who is, to this day, known as the Sweet Psalmist of Israel and a man after God's own heart, committed adultery with Bathsheba. When David discovered that Bathsheba was pregnant, he conspired to have her husband, Uriah, murdered to cover the affair. And yet, David is known as a man after God's own heart. Our familiarity with the story mitigates the enormity of God's grace in David's repentance.

When, at God's direction, Nathan the Prophet confronted the king with his sin, David cried out to God and expressed his repentance in Psalm 51. I will work through the text, making comments along the way, then conclude with a few thoughts. Before we get to the text, let's pray.

I do not recall ever preaching a sermon on Psalm 51, and I am not sure why. Derek Kidner skillfully identified the richness of the gift of repentance in his powerful commentary on the Psalms. Should you purchase Kidner's two-volume set on the Psalms, my guess is that these two small books will become among your most treasured possessions. To save time, I will not reference Kidner every time I borrow from his wisdom but know that I am, indeed, borrowing from him. Verses 1-3:

**Psalm 51:1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.**

**2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!**

**3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.**

To say that David's conscience was smitten with conviction when God's Word revealed his sin would be an understatement. David's immediate appeal was to God's *hesed*, or, to his steadfast love. According to Michael Card, *hesed*, a covenant word, is "when the person from whom I have a right to expect nothing gives me everything."

David had no interest in seeking to justify himself or to explain his sin. Notice how he took full responsibility for his sin five times in the first three verses, praying, "God, cleanse me from my sin, my transgressions, my iniquity." Thankfully, God's mercy was, and, is, in abundant supply for the repentant soul. Verse 4:

**4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment.**

When David stated that his sin was against God alone, he was not shirking responsibility for his sins, rather, he recognized that sin is more than anything else an offense against a holy creator God. David moved from "How can I cover my sins?" to "How could I do such a thing against God, who only does good to me?" Verse 5:

**5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.**

David was not saying his birth was the result of a sinful relationship, but, rather, he was acknowledging the stain on his character that all humans inherited from Adam – the stain of a sinful nature. David's

confession of his sin makes his acknowledgement of God's character in verse 6 even more startling:

**6 Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.**

Wow! Immediately following David's acknowledgement of his own sin, he gave testimony to God's holiness and his exacting standard for his children. In verses 7-9, it becomes clear that David was not looking for half-hearted help:

**7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.**

**8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.**

**9 Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.**

Verses 10-12 elucidate the beauty of God's gift of repentance:

**10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.**

**11 Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.**

**12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.**

In asking God to create in a clean heart in him, David was asking for nothing less than a miracle, for only God can create. His concern in verse 11 was that God not to leave him like he had left Saul. As Kidner says about David's prayer for God not to take his Holy Spirit from him, David was not concerned with the base doctrine of perseverance, or, eternal security, but the practice of it. David did not take Yahweh's presence in his life for granted. Then, "Restore to

me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit,” or as we will sing in a few minutes, “and renew a right spirit within me.” The remainder of the Psalm speaks of the restoration that is available for those who repent of their sins. Verse 13:

**13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.**

**14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.**

**15 O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.**

**16 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.**

**17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.**

**18 Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
build up the walls of Jerusalem;**

**19 then will you delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.**

Five truths and their implications found in Psalm 51, beginning with:

- 1. We are all susceptible to grievous sin, and make no mistake, there are consequences for our sin (2 Samuel 12:7-12, 14-15)**

What surprises us most is that a man after God’s own heart could commit the sins that David did. But *why* does it shock us? We say that we are all capable of any sin, but I don’t think we believe it because we think ourselves incapable of such behavior. Do not misunderstand – we pledge faithfulness to our spouses on our

wedding day for a reason, and you may not fall to this temptation or that temptation, but you have a weakness or a blind spot, and Satan would love to blindside you. Think about it – Satan will hit you where you do not expect to be hit, and you may never see it coming because you think you are above that sin. And there may be consequences for your sin, which is why we must lean hard into the truth of the second point:

2. The mercy of God is the only remedy for our condition and for our sinful actions (Psalm 51:1-2, 7-12)

If you are a believer, then, when I say that all humans inherited the sin nature that Adam assumed when he sinned, and when I say that we can never throw off that sin nature and become worthy to stand before God without him destroying us, you already know this. You also know that the only thing that could be done about our sin was for the Father to send his Son, Jesus, to live without sin and to die as an acceptable sacrifice for our sins. When we repent of our sins and believe that Jesus died in our place, then we belong to God – we are his children. What happens when believers sin, as we all do? When we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We know all this, but sometimes we need the cold water of Psalm 51 to remind us that we are inclined to sin, and we may seek to cover up our sin, or to justify it, but we are sinful men and women who need God's mercy. In fact, we are hopeless without God's mercy in our lives. Our current times, though, do not naturally lead us to acknowledge our sins because we are too busy acknowledging other people's sins. How do you feel about masks? How do you feel about those whose opinions differ from you? How do you feel about the social and racial issues of our day? How do you feel about those who differ from you? If we are to be under the fount of God's blessings, we will need to accept and practice the truth of our third point:

- 3. We can say that David was a man after God's own heart because he was willing to say, "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:13)**

You may as well accept it, follower of Jesus – you will never achieve perfection in this life. Romans 7 and Galatians 5 both teach that the life of the believer will be a struggle between the Spirit and the flesh. What is so tricky about the flesh is that it likes to imitate the life of Christ – but not with the proper motive in mind. Another trick of the flesh is to make you think you are doing so well that you are offended by the suggestion that you have done wrong and need to ask forgiveness of God or of anyone else. Not very many of us are honest with ourselves about our sin. This is not a day to admit you are wrong unless you are doing so to achieve social status. If you force someone to apologize, do not assume he has repented. When the Lord convicts us of sin, though, David's example should encourage us to be more honest with God and with others about our sins. How does he encourage us to do so? That is the focus of the fourth point:

- 4. The believer's life is defined by neither his righteousness nor his sin, but by her identity with Christ (1 Chronicles 29:10-22; Romans 6:1-11)**

As I am aging, I find that I must wrestle against the temptation to cynicism. You would think I would not struggle with that since for my entire adult life I have followed world news with keen interest. Uhhhh – if that won't make you cynical, nothing will.

King David lived 1,000 years before Jesus, but he is the closest example of a New Testament-style individual that I find in the Old Testament. He prayed to the Lord directly when most offered their prayers through a human representative of the Lord. His

relationship with Yahweh seems like that of the Apostle Paul, who longed for intimacy with Jesus. David placed all his hope for salvation in the Lord, while many looked within for righteousness. Even though David could not have understood the significance of his words in Psalm 110, Jesus pointed to verse 1, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.’” By the way, I am not sure the Bible works without the 7 short verses of Psalm 110 – in God’s sovereignty, of course. That would be a good beach study for you.

There are many directions I could go with this fourth point, but I wanted to direct your attention to 1 Chronicles 29 – not to read now but for later consideration. At the end of David’s life, he led the people in praise to Yahweh. After all the pain David had endured because of others’ sin, and after all the pain he had inflicted on others because of his own sin, David praised the Lord at the end of his life. He did so because he recognized the truth of the last point:

5. The ways of God are too marvelous for us – “And the Lord loved Solomon” (2 Samuel 12:24-25)

How should David’s life have gone after his affair and his murderous attempt to cover his sin? David’s sin caused great pain for God’s covenant people. We know the story, but we tend not to think too deeply about it because we cannot find a place for it in our worldview or social imaginary or theological constructs – except that we were all just as guilty as David before God saved us from our sins, and until the day we see Jesus, we will be just as much in need of his forgiveness for our daily sins as David was because he is holy and we are not. We are forgiven in Jesus. That is a good word!

I will close by reading 2 Samuel 12:24-25, which comes just after Nathan’s rebuke of David, in the story, and after the death of

David's son, who was born as a result of the affair. 2 Samuel 12:24-25:

24 "Then David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her, and she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. And the Lord loved him 25 and sent a message by Nathan the prophet. So he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord."

Jedidiah means "beloved of the Lord." Aren't you glad that God does not leave us in our sins? Rather than condemning us, he gives us the beautiful gift of repentance. Whether you came this morning feeling ashamed or wearing the clothes of arrogance, the Lord stands ready to forgive you if you will repent. Repentance requires honesty and humility and belief that God is true to his word. After I pray, we will sing the words of Psalm 51 together, "Create in me a new heart." Let's pray.