

# Psalm 51

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 10 November 2013

Preacher: Jonny Gibson

[ 0 : 00 ] C.S. Lewis once said, Time does not erase the fact or the guilt of sin.! Time does not erase the fact or the guilt of sin.

! Last year, just before Easter, our washing machine started spilling water out of the overflow pipe during its rinse cycle. One morning I was leaving the house, and next thing there was this flood of water coming out from underneath the washing machine.

And to cut a long story short, what had happened is there had been a blockage in one of the pipes under our floorboards, and during the rinse cycle, the water was going down the overflow pipe, hitting the blockage and then just backing its way up and pouring out onto the kitchen floor.

Now in the weeks and months previous, I had been given a few warnings. So I remember one morning seeing a trickle of water come out from underneath the washing machine, and I just grabbed one of Jackie's blouses and dried it up.

A few weeks previous, I remember on the rinse cycle, the kitchen sink started spitting water up and gurgling loudly. But because there wasn't any sort of volcanic eruption, I just ignored it.

[ 1 : 16 ] And then just a few days before the blockage, the kitchen sink started to drain really slowly, like, really slowly.

Like, hello, there's a blocked pipe below kind of slope. But you know what I was thinking when I got all these warning signs? It'll be alright.

It'll clear. Ah, it'll be a wee blockage. It'll clear in time. And then it happened. The blockage, the overflow, and there I was with tiles and everything all over the kitchen floor.

And after four hours of me trying to fix it, the kitchen sink wasn't even draining. And it came at quite a stressful time. I actually was going off to Australia to speak at a conference, and I had talks to prepare.

I had this talk to prepare. And I didn't have the time to be fixing a blocked pipe under my floorboards. And then, in God's kindness and providence, I realized, here was an illustration staring me right in the face.

[ 2 : 25 ] We sin every day. By thought, by word, by deed. If we do not confess our sins, then it is like the accumulation of dirt in the pipes of our relationship with God.

If sin is unconfessed, then it just sits there, building up and clogging up our relationship with God. And one thing is for certain, time does not erase the fact or the guilt of sin. And that was a lesson that King David had to learn.

And in learning it, he left us with a wonderful example of a Christian confession of sin. This psalm, Psalm 51, set within the context of the whole Bible, gives us five aspects of a Christian confession of sin.

Number one, confession of sin comes only through divine revelation. Confession of sin comes only through divine revelation.

[ 3 : 43 ] Just take a glance down to the superscription. That's the beginning part in your Bibles. If you've got the NIV, it's the bit at the beginning of Psalm 51 in capital letters.

Now this hasn't been added by the NIV or ESV translators. This is part of the original. It's not irrelevant. It's actually the key to understanding this psalm.

In fact, it presents us with the foundation for a Christian confession of sin. To the choir master, a psalm of David when Nathan, the prophet, went to him after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

Now we're not told how long it was between David committing adultery with Bathsheba and Nathan, the prophet's visit. But from the story of 2 Samuel 11 and 12, it looks like Nathan came to David either just before or just after the birth of the boy who was born from this adulterous affair.

That's about nine months. Nine months to wake up. Nine months to come to his senses. Nine months for the guilt to get so heavy that eventually he cracks and runs back to God in confession. [ 5 : 06 ] I mean, just think about what he had done. He had failed to go to war. 2 Samuel 11 starts with those wonderful words. In the spring when kings go off to war, David sent Joab, his commander, to fight the Ammonites.

What a brilliant way to open the drama. So not only does he not go to war when he should have, he sends somebody else to fight the war for him. And then one night as he's looking out on his balcony, he spots a woman, another man's wife.

And a bit of laziness leads to lust and the lust leads to an affair. But David wants to cover it up until his secret hits a bump.

Quite literally in the tummy of Bathsheba. So what does he do? He calls her husband back from war. He tries to tell him to go and spend a night with a missus so that he can cover up his crime. And when he doesn't play ball, he brings him to his dinner table, gets him drunk, sends him back again, still doesn't play ball. So what does he do? He sends him back to the battlefield with his own death warrant in his hand.

[ 6 : 23 ] he says to Joab, make sure you put Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, at the front of the battle line. And in that fight, it wasn't just Uriah who died, it was other men who died fighting on the front with Uriah because David's army pulled back and let them get killed.

And then when the messenger comes to David and says, Uriah is dead, David responds with ice cold calculation. Well, that's war.

Some are taken, some are not. C'est la vie. Now, nine months David had to live with all of those things on his conscience.

270 nights going to sleep with blood on his hands. So why didn't he repent?

Why couldn't he come to his senses? I mean, if you had had a secret affair, you'd lied, you'd murdered someone to cover up, wouldn't you come to your senses?

[ 7 : 33 ] Wouldn't you wake up and say, okay, enough's enough, I need to admit I've done wrong? Well, the reason why David didn't and the reason why neither you nor I would is because the DNA of sin is deception.

Built into the very nature of sin is deceitfulness. And that is why David didn't have the wherewithal, the objective self-assessment, the ability to differentiate between himself and his sin and to be able to see that what he had done was wrong and to confess his sins.

This is the fact that the Bible gives us, that as human beings we do not have the ability for true, clear, objective, accurate self-assessment, self-analysis.

David didn't and neither do we because sin is deceitful. It was the Puritan John Flavel who said that you are more likely today to stop the sun in its tracks or to make rivers run uphill than you are to order or rule your own heart.

Think about that. You are more likely to stop the sun moving east to west than you are to rule and order your own heart.

[ 9 : 03 ] and that is the fact of sin. It is deceitful. So what was it that brought David to repentance?

Well the answer is there in the superscription. Divine revelation. A psalm of David that he wrote when Nathan the prophet went to him.

confession of sin comes only through divine revelation.

confession of sin faces sin square on. Confession of sin faces sin square on.

Verses 1 to 6 Now I should warn you this point is the longest of all of the five because if we are going to confess our sins are right then we need to first understand exactly what sin is.

[ 10 : 18 ] And David gives us a very comprehensive view of sin. He covers three aspects. Its definition its defilement and its dimensions.

Let's look at sin's definition verses 1 and 2. Have mercy on me O God according to your steadfast love according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

Did you notice the different ways David refers to his crimes transgressions iniquity sin transgression in verse 1 refers to rebellion the breaking of God's law transgression is willful deliberate defiant acts of rebellion at the heart of a human being is a rebel I'm sure you have seen that perhaps with some of your children or other people's children you say to your child don't touch that and then what do you find them doing within 30 seconds sort of just loitering around the thing you said don't touch

and then they go to touch it what is that that is defiant rebellion I remember a friend of mine years ago in a church he'd become a grandfather and he tells a story of when his daughter his granddaughter came into the house one day and she came in and in the hallway his wife had this beautiful vase at a table about knee height and they came into the house and the little daughter went she was about three years old she went straight for the vase and the mother and the grandmother said now this is a beautiful vase we don't want you to touch it so come into the living room and the mother was very clear this is grandmother's vase you do not touch this vase well within a few minutes everyone was in the living room enjoying conversation and the grandfather sitting in the chair noticed that the granddaughter made her way back out into the hallway towards this little table and the door was ajar so he could see out and she went to the table and she sort of looked over her shoulder took her vase and pushed it onto the ground and it smashed now what is that that is transgression that is a deliberate defiant rebellion against a mother's rule and that is what transgression is in the bible god gives us his law and we deliberately break it the second word is iniquity verse 2 this refers to perversity it means to bend or to pervert it's used in some context of straying off a path waywardness of the three terms here this is the internal word it refers to the warped human nature bent from the inside it's like one writer calls it the incurve the incurvature human beings are bent on the inside when I see this word in the bible

I think of golem in lord of the rings you know that pathetic creature who grasped for the precious the ring only to find himself bent inward left with only himself imprisoned by his own jealousies and hatred the groove of the incurve had taken its toll and he had just continued to down spiral in his depravity that is a picture of iniquity perversity the incurve and then there is the word sin this is referring this refers to failure to missing the mark like an arrow that falls short of its target God's glory and holiness is the target and we have fallen short of that but we mustn't think that we were trying to aim for the target and we were just unfortunate not to hit it no as we were aiming for the target we deliberately moved our arm so that we missed the target this word sin needs to be understood in the context of the other two words transgression and iniquity we deliberately wanted to miss

God's target and so there we have it the terrible threesome of human depravity transgression iniquity and sin and it is these three words in the Old Testament that capture the concept of sin and David defines his actions with all three words that is sin's definition then there is sin's defilement did you notice the verbs that David uses verse 1 blot out verse 2 wash me thoroughly verse 2 cleanse me what picture do those words give you remember years ago as a physiotherapist working in a hospital and on a few occasions when I was working with spinal cord injury patients I got human feces on my hands and my clothes and I remember the feeling of it

[16:05] I wanted to blot out the dirt I wanted to run to a shower room and get out of my clothes and burn the clothes not just get them washed I wanted to burn them and I wanted to get in a hot shower and I want to get my hands in it and I wanted to be thoroughly cleansed and that is the picture that David gives us here sin stinks sin defiles sin stains and what David wants is to be thoroughly washed to be thoroughly cleansed from the defilement of sin well he gives us sin's definition he gives us sin's defilement but he also gives us various dimensions of sin verses 3-6 this aspect of sin relates to its inescapability did you notice the word for at the beginning of verse 3

David wants his sin blotted out and he wants himself washed and cleansed because his sin is inescapable for my transgressions and my sin is ever before me that is the first dimension the outward dimension sin is outside him staring him down his language conveys the idea of guilt that is attached to sin that external burden that you feel when you have sinned the guilt and the dread of what you have done then there's the vertical dimension verse 4 against you only against you you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight now I'm sure you notice the anomaly there against you you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight

I mean was David sucking back too much and a bit Israeli wine or something when he wrote this I mean who has he sinned against he sinned against Bathsheba he sinned against Joab he sinned against the nation he sinned against Uriah he sinned against the people who died in battle beside Uriah he sinned against his whole army he sinned against his servants who called Bathsheba to come to his room he sinned against everyone who hasn't he sinned against he sinned against his own wives yet here he says against you, you only it's emphatic I have sinned what is the point that he's trying to make well it's surely this that in a sense when we sin no matter the collateral damage at the end of the day it all pales into insignificance because God is God he is thrice holy as we have

sang this morning and when we sin the primary person against whom we have sinned is God that's why David actually chooses a new word to define his actions he doesn't choose transgression or iniquity or sin do you see that in verse 4 he uses a new word, evil he sees his sin in a whole new dimension when it is seen before the face of God this whole escapade with Bathsheba and Uriah and the lies and the affair and the murder it is one heinous act of evil in God's sight so that's the vertical dimension we've seen the outward one the vertical one and then there's an inward one verses 5 to 6 this is the dimension that is internal internal behold I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me behold you delight in truth in the inward being and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart

I remember at Bible college the principal coming in one day he was teaching us original sin and he said he had just had a granddaughter who'd been born and he started the class by saying my beautiful granddaughter is making me doubt the doctrine of original sin now he was only joking but David here is not playing around is he?

as he wriggled forth that's actually what the Hebrew says as I wriggled forth from my mother I wriggled in iniquity I came out of my mother with the incurve at work with perversity with waywardness cute and cuddly on the outside but with the incurve on the inside but he doesn't just stop there at his birth as if that wasn't enough he goes back to the very moment of conception that moment when one sperm out of hundreds of millions fertilized an egg in his mother at that very moment what does David say?

[ 21 : 45 ] there was sin present conceived in sin born in iniquity I'm sure you've seen the program one born every minute can you imagine after all of the screaming and pushing and yelling and that's just the husband the baby is born and this beautiful cute baby is curled up on his mother's breast and the midwife comes in with one of those helium balloons and hands it to the husband says congratulations and he takes the helium balloon and hands it to the wife and it says congratulations it's a sinner can you imagine?

and yet that is actually what David is saying here from my birth I have been like this and the point he's making is this we are not sinners because we sin you don't first sin and then become a sinner what David's saying is we sin because we are sinners it is part of our nature now that doesn't take away the responsibility but he is trying to get back to the root of his problem and it goes back to his conception to his birth and these polluted waters of sinful nature they run deep within all of us you see there David says in verse 6 in the inward being in the secret heart God teaches us wisdom God is saying I want you to be truthful even in the subconscious parts of your being let me take you back to that incident of my friend's granddaughter as she went out of the room back to the vase the dog followed her and the door was sort of left ajar and the grandfather was watching and she sort of looked through and through and she pushed the vase onto the floor and it smashed and then she came running back into the living room crying and do you know what she was saying it was doggy it was doggy well it wasn't doggy the dog stood beside her but she was the one who pushed her but now she is three years old she has no siblings she is the first one where did she learn that that is not learned behavior that is not a child who is mal-adjusted or has anxiety issues that is sin in the deep recesses of her conscience to lie like that to her mother and what David is saying is God requires truth from us even in those inner parts of her being well David as you can see has faced his sin square on he has taught us the doctrine of total depravity our sin is original our sin is everywhere it is outside us we are sinning before God it is inside us

David has faced sin square on well number three confession of sin acknowledges God alone as the only effective savior confession of sin acknowledges God alone as the only effective savior verses 7 to 12 purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean wash me and I shall be whiter than snow let me hear joy and gladness let the bones you have broken rejoice hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities create in me a clean heart oh God and renew a right spirit within me cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit what is interesting here is that

David's request here is that he renews his appeal for cleansing in verses 7 to 9 something that he's asked for in verses 1 and 2 but he adds in another request verses 10 to 12 David is not requesting here it's the request sorry for renewal David's not requesting here the decisive cleansing of renewal at conversion but rather the ongoing cleansing and renewal in a believer's life we continue the Christian life as we began it with repentance and renewal and you'll notice David requests both repentance and renewal sorry both cleansing and renewal he wants cleansed and renewed

because without cleansing there is no lasting change no lasting renewal but note also the order of the events or the requests he wants first to be cleansed and then to be renewed this is something that secular thinking in psychology and sociology has not really grasped what do they try to do they switch that around they try to change the human being first in order that they might cleanse their conscience but the Bible gives us a completely different way of dealing with our sin first we need to be cleansed and then we need to be renewed

I like to think of these two aspects of confession a bit like light and heat in order to have heat you must first have light but where there is light there will be heat and when you ask God to cleanse you he's not just going to cleanse you he wants to change you as well and that is what is at the heart of confession a request for cleansing and renewal but I wonder if you notice what was most striking about the heart of this confession in verses 7 to 12 every verse that I've just read there contains two imperatives two commands two requests to God that's 12 all together in fact the whole psalm is dominated by imperatives 20 times in 19 verses 20 times David requests something from God now that's not just a piece of statistical trivia for the mathematicians in the congregation by calling on God to do something 20 times in a matter of 19 verses and 12 times in a matter of 6 verses in the middle of the psalm

[ 29 : 09 ] David is making a profound theological point and it's this only God can cleanse only God can change a person he doesn't turn inward to himself he doesn't find the resources for change or improvement or development of himself inside himself he has to go outside himself he has to go to God the interesting verb the most interesting verb of all of the ones that he uses in verse 10 create in me a clean heart oh God in biblical Hebrew there's about three or four verbs that are used for creating or making there's a verb yatsar it's used of God fashioning the heavens and the earth but it's also used of a potter in Isaiah fashioning and forming his clay there's the verb asah which is used in

Genesis 2 of God making man from the dust of the earth but it's also used in Genesis 12 of Abraham making an altar at Shechem there is a third verb it's the verb bara the beginning of the Hebrew Bible starts in the beginning God created and what is interesting about this verb bara is that God is only ever the subject of this verb it's not that the verb means to create from nothing every single time it does mean that in Genesis 1 but the interesting thing about the verb is it occurs 45 times in the Old Testament and never is it used of a human being a human being never bara's that's terrible Hebrew but a human being never does bara only God now which verb do you think David used here it's the verb bara he's saying

God you alone are the one who can create this new heart in me and that is the profound point that David is making only God can perform heart surgery on a human being I remember years ago being at a conference and seeing on the bookstall at this conference a book with the title You Can Change and I remember thinking who ordered that dodgy book for this Christian conference and then I realised I had I was the one on the bookstall and as I got closer I remembered the subtitle and I could see it there You Can Change sounds like a bit of pop psychology You Can Change subtitle God's transforming power for your negative emotions and sinful behaviour it's a great book it's by Tim Chester You Can

Change God's transforming power there's the answer to change do you ever feel caught in the cycle of your sin the answer is not in some pop psychology or even some well researched psychology the answer is turning to God and saying God create in me a clean heart and renew a steadfast spirit within me now up to this point in the sermon you may be wondering if my name is Rabbi Gibson after all there is nothing different here in this sermon from a Jewish exposition of this confession of sin which brings us to our fourth point confession confession of sin is centered on Christ and his cross confession of sin is centered on Christ and his cross verses 16 to 19 there are hints in this psalm that the real help for our sin lies in the future the hints come in the form of tensions there's two tensions within the psalm that point us beyond the psalm for their resolution the first tension is to do with the word righteousness look back at verse 4 against you you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight so that you may be righteous justified righteous in your words and blameless in your judgment

David acknowledges that his actions before God are evil David is referring to the time God spoke and judged his sin when Nathan the prophet visited him in that encounter Nathan said to David David you are the man and what you have done is evil so when David recalls his actions here and calls them evil he's saying I agree with you God that you have a right to judge me that you are

righteous in condemning my sin so keep that in mind here in verse 4 he's used the word righteousness to refer to condemning his sin now come with me to verse 14 deliver me from blood guiltiness O God O God of my salvation and my tongue will sing aloud of your mercy it doesn't say that it says my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness righteousness

[ 35 : 12 ] David wants to sing of God's righteousness in saving him from his sin in fact look at the word blood guiltiness he's saying I murdered someone now will you please save me because of your righteousness do you see the tension in verse 4 David is saying you were righteous to condemn me to judge me for my sin and in verse 14 he's saying be righteous and save me from my sin now how can God be righteous in both ways how can he judge sin in verse 4 and yet at the same time at the very same time how can he show mercy and rescue David from the exact same sin do you feel the tension it's real but it's not the only tension there's a second tension did you notice the tension surrounding sacrifice verses 16 and 17 for you will not delight in sacrifice or I will give it you will not be pleased with a burnt offering the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit a broken and contrite heart of God you will not despise so what does God delight in not burnt offerings but a broken heart now look at verses 18 and 19 do good to Zion in your good pleasure build up the walls of Jerusalem then you will delight in right sacrifices are these the sacrifices of a broken heart no you will delight in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings then bulls will be offered on your altar

I mean which sacrifice is it is it the sacrifice of a broken heart or is it the sacrifice of bulls which delights God burnt bull or broken heart do you feel the tension so the question is how shall we resolve these tensions perhaps the better question is where shall we resolve these tensions well the new testament gives us a very simple answer at the cross of Christ in Romans chapter 3 verse 21 Paul says but now a righteousness from God has been revealed and then he goes on to say that God presented Christ as a propitiation as a wrath appeasing sacrifice for sin so that he might be righteous just in punishing sin and the justifier the saviour of those who have faith in Jesus in other words in the one moment of the cross when Christ received the father's wrath for our sins the righteousness of God was revealed he judged sin and at the very same moment he saved sinners the cross is the place to resolve this tension where God can be righteous and judge sin and God can be righteous and rescue people because righteousness refers to God acting in accordance with his character his character is holy so he must judge sin but his character is also grace and mercy and so he must rescue sinners this is also where the tension of which sacrifice delights God is resolved which sacrifice delights God a broken heart or a burnt bull answer both for at the cross it was not a bull that was burnt but it was a son that was bruised as a fulfillment of all of the

Old Testament bull sacrifices and when a sinner comes to this cross of Jesus Christ they bring nothing but brokenness the sacrifice of brokenness does not appease God this is where Roman Catholicism has got penance wrong the sacrifice of brokenness does not please God the sacrifice of brokenness pleases God because it is a recognition that you have no sacrifice to bring does that make sense the sacrifice of brokenness pleases God because you're saying there must be another sacrifice I've got nothing to bring nothing in my hand I bring simply to your cross I cling naked come to you for dress helpless look to you for grace fall

I to the fountain fly wash me savior or I die the reason your brokenness delights God is because you're saying I need the bruised son to die in my place confession of sin is centered on Christ and his cross and finally confession of sin is only ever met by God's grace confession of sin is only ever met by God's grace verses 18 and 19 do good to Zion in your good pleasure build up the walls of Jerusalem then you will delight in right sacrifices and burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings then bulls will be offered on your altar isn't that a strange way to end this psalm I thought this was all about David's personal sin but he ends talking about the protection of Jerusalem and restored corporate worship in Zion why well the answer is simple

[ 41 : 29 ] David has realized that when he sinned he did not sin as an individual he did sin as an individual but he is not a mere individual David is a representative individual what is David he is a father he is a husband he is a king and he knows that when he has sinned he has sinned in each of those offices and so he knows that his sin while personal will always have collateral damage and that is the same with us brothers and sisters I am a husband I am a father when I sin in my home it is not just me who suffers my wife suffers my son suffers and David here confesses his sin as an individual but he also confesses his sin as a husband and a father and primarily as a king of Israel and he knows that because of his sin there has been collateral damage the baby is born and the

baby dies during his affair with

Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah the war against the Ammonites was halted they couldn't defeat the Ammonites and so David prays to God that God might act in mercy and do good to Zion Lord don't let my sin hinder the progress of this nation and that is why he says do good to Zion in your good pleasure build up the walls of Jerusalem now the question is what was David's confession met with this psalm doesn't give us the answer but when you put this psalm in the context of the whole Bible what you see is that David's confession was only met with grace he confessed his sin read 2 Samuel chapter 12 what happens they go back to war and they defeat the Ammonites Israel is protected who is the heir to the throne after

David Solomon and what marriage does Solomon come from the affair with Bathsheba and what's interesting is when you read the life of Solomon when he becomes king you know one of the first things he does he fixes a part of the walls of Jerusalem just a sort of innocuous comment but he rebuilds some of the walls of Jerusalem so here is David he is dead he is past and here is God answering his prayer years later but here is the biggest act of grace!

what is the family line of Jesus Christ he comes from this adulterous affair his name is that he will save his people from their sins and he comes from the messiest dirtiest family a man and a woman who had an affair one night and God flows grace through that family line and not just back to them to us this morning brothers and sisters if God had not responded in grace to David and his prayer after he confessed his sin where would we be this morning we would not be here there would be no Jesus Christ but because God met David with grace and mercy we have received mercy and grace because that great grandson of Bathsheba

David's greater son Jesus Christ has come to die and rise again so that we might be forgiven confession of sin is only ever met with God's grace it's not that there aren't consequences for our sins there are huge consequences and may that be an incentive to us not to sin because sin never comes without consequences but if we have sinned let us know that we come to a God who is a father of grace and mercy and not an angry judge I remember last year when the Lance Armstrong saga broke and it came out that he had actually taken drugs to win all of his Tour de France titles I remember listening to the media on the BBC website TV programs etc what I found fascinating was the response was anger disappointment condemnation stripping of all his titles do you know the one word

[ 46 : 49 ] I never heard grace! member of my family I love the words of that old hymn well may the accuser roar of sins that I have done I know them all and thousands more Jehovah knoweth none let's pray a