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Text: Psalm 51
Title: God, I've well and truly blown it!
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File: Psalm 51

It is a warm, spring night and King David can't sleep. He's wondering how the Israelite army is doing. He normally went with them, but this time he had decided to stay home. So he grabs the TV remote—150 channels but nothing on. He gets out of his bed and walks around on the roof of his palace. He admires his impressive city. Just as he is ready to go back to bed, he sees a beautiful woman bathing. Instead of turning away, he allows his mind to be filled with lust.

David asks one of his servants about this woman. He is told that her name is Bathsheba. She is the wife of Uriah—one of his soldiers. She is married. David should have proceeded no further. But by this time he feels the temptation is too strong. David sends a messenger to get Bathsheba. She comes to him, and he sleeps with her. Then she returns home. David thinks that's it. I've got away with it. But a few days later, Bathsheba sends a message to David: "I'm pregnant."

What is he going to do? Imagine if the Jerusalem tabloids hear about his affair. It would destroy his reputation. It might even affect his reign. Instead of doing the right thing, David attempts to cover up his adultery, which tragically leads to more and more sin.

David picks up his mobile phone and calls his general Joab: "Send me Uriah." When Uriah arrives, David asks him how Joab is, how the soldiers are and how the war is going. Then David says to Uriah, "Go down to your house and see your wife." David is hoping that Uriah will go home and sleep with Bathsheba and think that her child is his. But when Uriah leaves the palace, he doesn't go home. Instead, he sleeps at the entrance to the palace with David's servants.

David is informed that Uriah didn't go home & is shocked. He asks him, "Why didn't you go home?" Uriah answers, "My master Joab and our men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and sleep with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" Uriah's answer fills David with guilt.

David is frustrated with Uriah. In the morning David sends an email to Joab. It says, "Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die." A few days later, Joab gives David an update on the battle. At the end of the message, David reads the words "Uriah is dead."

David thinks that Uriah's death ends his problems. Eventually Bathsheba becomes his wife...and they live happily ever after, Right? Wrong. No Nathan the prophet appears to King David and tells him, no one knows what you have done, no-one, except God. And God is really, really angry with you.

I love how when you read the Bible, you can so easily see the stories repeating themselves today. I love that it doesn't gloss over David's sin. I love how he doesn't always do what is right. Because when I read the story of David, or Abraham, or Job, or Jeremiah, or Peter, I am actually rereading my story. I am learning about my sin,

my need for forgiveness, my life.

So what does King David do when he is caught with his hand in the cookie jar? Where does David go when his sin is finally found out? He goes to God in prayer. And he writes down what we know today as Psalm 51. In the worst tragedy. In the midst of death and destruction. In the middle of the darkest of dark nights, a man who shouldn't have a prayer, explores not only the depths of his guilt but how amazing God's grace and forgiveness and mercy really is. And he starts off by saying

1. Cleanse Me (verses 1 to 7)

Have mercy on me O God. ... Wash away all my iniquity.... Cleanse me from my sin... Cleanse me with hyssop... Wash me and I will be whiter than snow....

David starts off with an acknowledgement of his sin. He realises that he has committed adultery and murder. He is well aware that he has coveted his neighbour's wife, he has then stolen her and then he has lied about it. He has in fact broken 5 of the 10 commandments virtually at once.

So he doesn't try to cover them up or to blame God for them. "Lord, if you hadn't made me king I wouldn't be walking on this palace roof in the first place". And he doesn't start blaming Bathsheba, "God, did you see what she wasn't wearing?" No he humbly acknowledges his wrongdoing.

And friends we need to take a leaf out of David's book on this one. We can't blame our parents, our family, our upbringing, our lack of money for our sins. We need to acknowledge our wrongdoing. We need to admit our guilt. We need to realise that before we cast the first stone and condemn others, we are far from innocent ourselves. Before we take the speck out of the other person's eye, we have to admit the log that is in our own eye.

But more than that, we have acknowledge that when we sin, we sin against the people around us, but even more so, we sin against God Himself. That's what David says in verse 4 "*Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.*" So when we do things wrong, we fire the bullets at God and the ricochet hit others. The rebellion was against Him and others are collateral damage.

For God is the one who sets down the rules, so when we break them, we are defying Him. And God is the one who made the people around us so when we sin against them we sin against the one who made them as well as his sons and daughters.

I was reading recently about the Christian singer Nikki Leonte. As a child, she always had an amazing voice. In the late 1990's, she put together a string of top ten Christian songs. Her career was riding high. But in 1999, Nikki and her fiance discovered that they were pregnant. And this is what she said about the whole experience:

"I never thought that this would happen to me. I was the one up there preaching that True Love Waits! I never dreamed that I would compromise those boundaries. But I did. I lost my self-esteem and my self-respect. I let down my family. My friends. My record company. But for me, the worst thing of all was that I disappointed God."

That's something we need to remember to. When we sin we not only disappoint God, we make him angry. He is a God of justice, he must punish sin. He is a God of Holiness, he can't stand being in sin's presence. He is the God of goodness, sin is foreign to his ways. And so in some ways it doesn't matter whether it is a big sin or a little sin, its all disobedience, its all rebellion. Its all sinning against God.

So lets think about this for a moment. The next time we lie, it may affect the trust others have on us, but it hurts God much, much more. The next time we decide not to go to Church, it may affect our children, but it grieves God's heart even more. For what we do, the big and the little things, caused God to send his only son to die. That's how much it affects him. That's how important our little sins are. You see when we cross examine sin, we see it affects not just us, and others - it hurts our God.

But it doesn't stop there, for in verse 5, King David acknowledges that this isn't an isolated, one off event. No this sin is completely in character with his track record. Sure it might have been one of the worst sins he had ever committed, but from day one David has done the wrong thing. *Surely I was sinful at birth, he admits. Sinful from the time that my mother conceived me.* What David is acknowledging is that he is not just a sinner by choice, but a sinner by nature. Not that he has never done anything good, but even the good things he has done, can not even come close to make up for the sins he has committed.

So like King David you and I are in trouble, deep trouble. We have sin in our lives, blood on our hands, guilt in our head and darkness in our heart. So listen again to King David. *Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love. According to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions.... Cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean; wash me and I will whiter than snow.*

David can't wash his sins, like he washes out the dirt from out of his clothes. I can't cover up my guilt like I can cover up my mistakes with liquid paper. You can't throw away your sins as you throw away your garbage. God has to cleans us, God has to blot out our transgression. God has to wash me whiter than snow.

No amount of penance, or repentance, or change can take away our guilt. Only God can step in and give us mercy rather than justice. Love rather than punishment. Grace rather than condemnation. So that is what David asks God to do for him. But then in verses 8 to 13, he asks God to go one step further and not just cleanse me but

2. Restore Me. (verses 8-13)

For throughout the Psalm David has admitted that his sin has affected his whole person. It has affected his eyes, because according to verse 3 his sin is always before him. It has affected his mind because as he says in verse 6 his sin has affected his thinking. It has touched his bones as it crushes them, his heart and spirit because it has been corrupted, and his hands because he now has blood on them. Sin demands a high price on us. Over time it can affect every part of our bodies and pollute even the best of our actions.

I don't know whether you have ever read Edgar Allen Poe's short story, "The Telltale

Heart”. In that story, the main character has committed murder and he buries the body of the victim in his basement. But the murderer is unable to escape the haunting guilt of his deed. He begins to hear the heartbeat of his dead victim. A cold sweat pours over him as that heartbeat goes on and on, relentlessly, getting louder and louder. Eventually, it becomes clear that the pounding which drove the man mad was not in the grave below but in his own chest.

And so the sinner, whether it be King David or myself, needs more than just forgiveness, we need restoration. More than just cleansing we need renewal. We need a pure heart. We need a steadfast spirit within us. We need God’s presence around us. We need strength and sustenance and peace.

And amazingly enough God is willing to answer this prayer of King David. Not just forgiveness is available to him but also salvation. Not just cleansing but transformation. God not only forgives our sin, but over time he helps make sin repulsive to us. Not only does he forgive us our past sins, but he can help take away our desire to sin in the future. For once grace replaces sin in the centre of our being it changes our direction, our perspective, our desires.

I’m sure you have all heard of the tele-evangelist Jimmy Bakker. In the mid 1980’s, he had everything he ever wanted: A thriving ministry. A television variety show. And lots of money. But there were problems. He was drifting further and further from God. And from his wife. Pressures mounted. Finally in 1989, it came out that Bakker was having an affair with one of his secretaries. And he was convicted of mail fraud and sentenced to 45 years in prison.

He went to jail with nothing except the clothes on his back and a Bible. And since he had nothing better to do, he sat down and read it from cover to cover for the first time in years. And this is what he said:

"Before I went to jail, I preached a lot of longhorn sermons: A point here. A point there. And a lot of bull in between. But the more I read the words of Christ, the more I realized that I was wrong. I was wrong for preaching that it was God’s will for everyone to be rich. I was wrong for loving the trappings of success more than Jesus. And I was wrong for cheating on the woman of my dreams. And I began to realize that God was stripping me of everything I once held dear so that the old Jim Bakker could die. And the new Jim Bakker created in the image of Jesus Christ could emerge."

That’s what God does to us when we come to him repenting of our sin. He not only gets rid of the old self, he renews us, over time, in the image of Jesus. It reminds me of the story of the potter who made the most beautiful pottery. For when he found a crack in one of the pots he made, he would fill in the cracks with gold filling. The more cracks the more gold filling. Likewise when we come to God broken He fills you with something more beautiful than gold. He fills you with Jesus.

3. Cleanse me, says David, Renew me, and thirdly Use me (verses 13 to 19.)

Verse 13, “Then I will teach transgressors your ways. Verse 14. Then my tongue will sing of your righteousness. Verse 15. Open my lips and my mouth will declare

your praises. God I want to make the most of my new start. Lord I went to learn from my past mistakes. Father use me, use me to teach others. Use me so that others can hear my testimony and hear about your forgiveness and love and grace. Use me.

Now those words are powerful words. I remember being a very new Christian and a preacher said to the congregation I was in, that we have to be careful about saying use me to God. He recounted that he had only said those words once in his life and God had turned his life upside down, in a wonderful, wonderful way.

Now I remember I went home that night and prayed the prayer, God please use me. And within a week someone had approached me to lead a Bible Study group. I said to them, I'm just 18 years old. I have only been a Christian a couple of years myself. I won't know the answers to all their question. But then I remember I had asked God to use me and maybe this was his answer. So I did it and have been leading bible studies ever since. A few years later I prayed that prayer a second time, Lord please use me. And soon after I was leading a fellowship group larger/much larger than the group that we have here today.

It's a powerful prayer. But it is a logical prayer. For those who have been down and out do have a powerful testimony of how God's grace is sufficient for them. What did Paul say in Romans 5:20, *where sin abounds, graces abound even more.* People can see the difference forgiveness makes, when they are not just reading about forgiveness off the pages of the Bible, but seeing it work out in everyday situations.

David knows that he could easily send a 1000 sheep to be sacrificed for his sins and it wouldn't really hurt him financially much at all. But God doesn't desire sacrifice, but brokenness. He wants us to empty ourselves of pride. He wants our self reliance to be broken. He wants us to be contrite, humble, dependent upon Him and Him alone. Because then he can use us. And then we will give him the glory rather than take the glory for ourselves.

That is why God time and time again doesn't use the multi talented, the top of the class type people. He uses ordinary, everyday people like you and me, who haven't got it all together, but who know and experience the grace and mercy of God.

And a great example of this is this Psalm itself. There David doesn't hide from his sin but lays his soul bare. And from his generation to ours, thousands of people, millions even have read it and realised that even though they are long, long, long way from God, they are not without hope. Their God is a God who is happy to

4. Cleanse me, restore me, use me and lastly change me.

Because lastly how does God actually do this? What does he do behind the scenes so to speak to enable David's prayer to actually work. David may be at the petrol station putting this prayer into his spiritual fuel tank, but what sort of engine is under the bonnet enabling his life to power on forward?

Well that is where the rest of the Bible comes into play. How does God cleanse me, wash away my iniquity, wash me whiter than snow? By sending his perfect son Jesus to die in my place? The man who never sinned, took our sin onto himself. He

immersed himself in our wrongdoing, in our filth, in our dirtiness and swapped it with his perfection, his sinlessness, his righteousness. He died so that we might live.

And how does God restore me, how does he create in me a clean heart? By giving us his Spirit, who now over time, works with us from the inside out. He changes our desires, our goals, our aims, our outlook in life. And so bit by bit we become the people he made us to become.

And how does he use people like me? How does he change me and give me something worth while to say to others? By replacing our brokenness with his wholeness. By swapping our pride with his presence. By placing his hand upon our lives and never letting us go. So it is Jesus who enables this prayer to be answered and Jesus who gives both power to these words and the power to change our lives.

Let me just ask you a question before I finish? If King David was in this Church, or if he lived in this community, would we forgive him? Would we hold his sin of adultery, cover up and murder against him, when God has declared him innocent? You see often God will forgive someone, whereas at the same time, we can't. Or God forgives us for our sin and yet we can't forgive ourselves either.

Friends we are responsible for our sin, when we do wrong, let's not blame others. We do need to turn to God. But if we do that, he cleanses us, he restores me and then he wants to use us. And if God wants to do these things to us and to others, please, please, please, don't get in His way!