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Thoughts from Psalm 51

Sin, Repentance, Confession, and the Goodness of God

Introduction – While I have been led to preach this sermon because of specific events in the life of our church, I am not intending at all to address those specific events. By God's Spirit, it is my hope to address your specific situations, our congregation corporately, and the glory of God in the salvation of countless sinners throughout the history of this world. The title words of the Psalm indicate that this was written at a time of a particular event, and yet it is evident in how God has given this (in the canon of scripture and with the words, "to the Chief Musician") that this confession is suitable for your private and personal confession, as well as for our corporate prayer.

I Need Mercy (vv1-2) – We plead for mercy because we have no merit on our own to earn God's ear. Our only hope in any confession of sin is in the lovingkindness of God, the multitude of His tender mercies. Confession of your sin can only take place because of God's character. David wants to be clean – all the way down – "*blot out,*" "*wash me thoroughly,*" "*cleanse me.*" Sin is like a tar pit; we can't wipe it away. Only God can cleanse us.

Because I Have Sinned (vv3-4) – Confession requires naming particular sins. *Homologeo* means "to say the same thing." And while we do sin against others, ultimately that sin is against God.

Secret Sin (1 Sam 11:1-27) – Here is the story of the David, the man after God's own heart, falling into terrible sin. He tries to hide one sin and eventually falls into worse and worse sin in the process. All the while, God-the-Judge is witness to everything that is happening. You cannot control secret sin – "*be sure, your sin will find you out*" (Num 16:33). The psalm is therefore not simply for those who have been caught in secret sin. It is for those who are even now partaking of secret sin and for those who will be tempted to do so in the future. The only way out is confession and repentance. God already knows.

Because I am a Sinner (vv5-6) – There is no place to give an excuse for your sin when confessing your sin. Adam tried to point the finger at his wife and at the circumstances God had given him as reasons for his sin. And because of Adam's fall, we are by nature now objects of wrath because we are by nature sinners. We are from the race of rebels, stillborn with regard to our ability to save ourselves. What this teaches us is that repentance and confession are themselves gifts from God who gives life.

Only God Can Do This (vv7-9) – A broken and contrite heart experiences pain that can be likened to the pain of a broken bone. Only God can mend that kind of pain. To be purged with hyssop is to be declared clean by the blood of another sprinkled upon you (Lev 14:6-7). A man broken over his sin is a man desperate to be clean and desperate for God to see him without any sin - because this man is desperate for God.

The Goodness of God – Beyond Restoration: God is in the business of raising the dead. But beyond restoring us to a place we once were, his grace takes us beyond and we are sanctified in His holiness as He works upon and in and through us (Rom 5:20-21, Phil 1:6).

Restoration to Previous Blessings (vv10-13) – In confession we are to pour our heart out to God. We can honestly tell Him that we do not have "joy," that we are not yet "renewed," that there is not a "steadfast spirit" in us. We plead with Him because we know we don't feel like doing right. We might remember having those emotions and that kind of will before, but we need it again, for we have lost it. Verse 13 is a wonderful promise that sinners are used by God to spread the gospel to a world of sinners. In Christ, your life is always useful to Him, no matter how far you had fallen.

The Gift of a Contrite Heart (vv14-17) – Part of going through the motions of confession of sin, repentance, and proper worship, is to confess that you are only going through the motions, "sacrifices" the Lord does not want. As God grants true repentance, He delivers us from our guilt, puts a new song in our heart, and praise upon our lips. When we aren't "there" yet, we pray to get "there." We pray for a broken and contrite heart when we don't have one because we know that is the only heart He will not despise.

Not Just the Individual, But the Church (vv18-19) – A little leaven leavens the whole lump and so we must pray for the church as part of our confession. When you sin, you can never know how much damage you have caused (Josh 7:1-5). Only God can build the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem. Only God can protect the church from all of the consequences of our sin – and the consequences go everywhere. If God answers the prayer of v18, then the glorious praise-feast alluded to in v19 will take place by a holy people before the Lord.

Application of Such Grace –

Your Secret Sin – If you are hiding sin today, confess it now before the Lord; you have no promise for tomorrow. If you have harmed

someone in that sin, confess it to them as well. In addition, you must seek to make restitution where damage has been incurred. Remember, God already knows your sin. And God loves to forgive.

Your Body-Connection – Sin blinds you and leads to more sin. Unconfessed sin harms the body because we are connected. Confession of sin restores the body and individual relationships. This is another way of seeing that repentance is a gift of God.

Honesty as Protection and Praise – The road to joy is always a road of confession and honesty before God. You are no hypocrite to sing His praises and obey His Word when you don't want to – if you honestly confess that to Him as well. God restored David, granted him a contrite heart, renewed his joy and gave him a steadfast spirit again. He will do so to every sinner who comes to Him in Jesus' name.

Dave Hatcher – January 29th, 2006