

Psalm 51

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[0 : 00] I would like to welcome everyone to our morning service. It's particularly good to meet together and also for one or two new people to join us. We do hope that you're blessed as you meet with us. Of course, when we come to worship God, we want to come joyfully to worship God.

The hymn writer Isaac Watts captured this perfectly with the words of one of his hymns. Come we that love the Lord and let our joys be known. Join in a song with sweet accord and thus surround the throne. The sorrows of the mind be banished from the place. Religion never was designed to make our pleasures less. What a wonderful hymn he wrote. And of course, the Bible speaks about blessings, about our receiving and knowing great happiness in knowing the Lord.

The psalmist David wrote these words in Psalm 32. Blessed, happy is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them, and in whose spirit there is no guile. So let's come together joyfully, praising the Lord as we sing number 23. O God, beyond all praising, we worship you today. Hymn number 23.

Hymn number 23. Visiting a library or bookshop doesn't appeal to everyone, might not appeal to you, but most of us do go into a bookshop occasionally in our lives, and one of the first things that you notice is that the shelves are arranged in some sort of order, some sort of section, and there'll be a section there on sport, perhaps history, gardening, science. And you can see that each section have books that have got a different purpose. Some authors want us to do something.

Some authors wanted to change our attitudes, and some merely to inform us or explain something to us. The Bible is a library. It's a library of 66 books. Some are classified as being Old Testament books, some New Testament books. The books have got a different style and purpose.

[2 : 59] The book of Psalms is all about experiencing God. Experiencing God in different circumstances, in sadness and joy, success and failure for individuals and for the community. That's the book of Psalms.

The Psalms are poetic, originally to be put to music, but one purpose in mind. Each particular Psalm has got a purpose in mind by the author that we might learn a right from it. It's a bit like our hymn book divided into, the Bible's a bit like our hymn book divided into sections, and so is the book of Psalms.

So what was the purpose of Psalm 51? The Psalm describes how David came back to his senses after he'd sinned, and had lost a sense of God's presence. And he asked God for forgiveness and inward cleansing, so that he might once again enjoy the presence of God, so that he might serve him joyfully.

The Psalm is about repentance. That's the overall name that you can give to the Psalm. And it's not merely there to inform us about David's experience.

It's intended to teach each one of us what is meant by repentance. And when you read the Psalm, you should think about it as being rather like looking in a mirror, so you can see if your repentance is genuine, biblical repentance, or something else.

[4 : 52] Three years ago, 2017, many churches celebrated the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther.

You remember how he nailed his 95 theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg? Martin Luther was a professor of biblical theology, and his famous theses were all, every one of them, about repentance.

Why was that? Well, sadly, so many of Martin Luther's contemporaries, even religious teachers, did not teach the truth about repentance.

And so Martin Luther thought it was really important to inform his pastoral flock, because he was also a pastor, but it was really important to inform his people about what marks out true repentance.

And I think it was the very first thesis that the Christian life is one of continual repentance. I wonder if that shocks you.

[6 : 04] And if you're living a Christian life, Psalm 51 should be a descriptor of your life.

That's why you should understand and reflect upon that psalm. Martin Luther certainly did. Now, the psalm should encourage you, if you are living the Christian life, if your life is one of continual repentance, but if not, it's something that will challenge you, challenge you deeply, and warn you, you are not a repentant person.

You're still hard-hearted, and you haven't bowed to the Almighty God in repentance. You'll notice that David wrote the psalm and delivered the psalm to the choir master following the occasion when Nathan the prophet had rebuked David and boldly accused him of some great sin.

It followed a time in David's life when he fell into great sin. And if you've been guilty of falling into any kind of temptation, and to be fair, each one of us does daily, that psalm is particularly helpful to you.

It will point you back to God, the way back to God. Psalm 51 is all about coming back to God. And of course, you won't want to come back to God if you've never felt you've walked away from him.

[7 : 41] I once spoke to a respected, knowledgeable Muslim man about this psalm, shared it with him, and he was very embarrassed by it. The reason why he was embarrassed was that he believed David was a prophet and therefore incapable of any sin.

So it came as a real shock to him when he saw that David was confessing his sins and asking God to make him anew. You know what?

It would be an embarrassment to you if your religious heroes are on such a pedestal that you think they cannot sin. But what if your religious hero is yourself?

What if you think proudly of your experience, your obedience, your work? Well, this psalm will cut across your thinking too and it will embarrass you.

But having said this, most of us, children included, will look upon David as being an amazing example of faith. And so he was. As a youth looking after sheep, he destroyed ravaging animals.

[8 : 54] As a young man, he overcame Goliath. And then he reunited the nation and destroyed the enemies that threatened the peace of the nation. He expanded the boundaries of the nation.

He was truly a godly man, a man of faith who accomplished great things through faith. And yet he fell. He fell short of being a perfect king.

Just like we fall short, way short of perfection. So David wasn't a perfect king, but in many ways, his reign foreshadowed that of Jesus.

A high point in his life was in 2 Samuel chapter 7. And here the Lord made an amazing promise to David. I won't read the whole of that promise, but right towards the end of that psalm, the Lord promised this to David.

Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever. He was speaking of David's descendant, the Lord Jesus Christ, God's true and most glorious king.

[10 : 19] Well, David was absolutely overcome when God brought him this promise, this promise of everlasting faithfulness. He was overcome by that, and yet within a chapter or two, chapter 11, David himself was overcome, but this time, not overcome with God's faithfulness, but overcome by temptation and sin.

If you think you stand, be careful lest you fall. Just off the A1 near Biggleswade, there's a bog, dreadful bog in the past.

Centuries ago, people used to tremble about crossing this bog. They used to fall into it as they crossed it, and with great difficulty, get out of it.

And that bog inspired John Bunyan to describe one particular incident in the life of his hero, as it were, Christian, pilgrim hero, Christian, it's in Pilgrim's Progress, and John Bunyan describes how Christian fell into a life-threatening bog, and in his lonely, hopeless struggle to get through the bog, a man called Help gave him his hand, and Help drew him out, and set him upon solid ground, and bade him go on his way.

Bunyan's not language, not me, I don't normally talk about bidding people to do this on the other, but that's the way that Bunyan put it. Now, David was in such a bog, he needed divine help.

[12 : 11] What was a man Help like? In his struggles, David reached out to the God that he knew, that he knew was faithful to his promises.

He remembered the promise-giving, promise-keeping God. He remembered the Lord, who had just given him an amazing, everlasting promise.

And in his life, he'd experienced many times when the Lord had been unfailing in his love towards him. So David had learned to trust his faithful God, even in life-threatening, dark experiences.

He knew the Lord, who does not change. He knew the Lord is faithful, and had given him an amazing promise, from his stretching force into eternity.

Now, if you're struggling after a fall, remember that if you are faithless, God remains faithful. So that brings us to verse 1.

[13:18] Verse 1, David said, David cried, don't think he just said in a nice, polite way, have mercy upon me, O God, according to your faithfulness.

He remembered the Lord, that he sung about in Psalm 103, which so many of us are familiar with. Psalm 103 is the basis of several hymns in our hymn book.

And in Psalm 103, David described the Lord, who made his ways known to Moses, the Lord who is compassionate, and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

And David went on to write, as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him.

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. David remembered the Lord, who forgives all our sins, who heals all our diseases, who redeems our life from the pit, who crowns us with love and compassion, so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.

[14:33] He prayed to this Lord, have mercy on me, O God, according to your faithfulness. Now, if the Psalm of Instruction wants us to remember the faithfulness of the Lord, it also reminds us of his righteousness, that God is righteous in all his ways, even those ways which don't necessarily please us, even those ways that don't suit us, those ways that trouble us.

And David was not a happy man when he experienced God's righteousness. When he wrote this Psalm, verse 8, he speaks of how the Lord had crushed his bones.

At the start of the service, I quoted the beginning of Psalm 32, that Psalm which speaks about the blessing that one has whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

Now, in Psalm 32, David went on to describe his torment before he knew that his transgressions were forgiven. He said this, When I kept silent, that's before I confessed my sin, when I kept silent, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long and night.

Your hand was heavy on me. My strength was sat as in the heat of summer. God is faithful, but is also righteous.

[16:13] And God's righteousness and faithfulness are brought together in Psalm 119, verse 75. Psalm 119, very easy to find.

It's the longest psalm in the Bible. This is what David, again, David's writing, I know, Lord, that your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness, you've afflicted me.

See the two things brought together. God's righteousness, righteousness in chastening David, and God's faithfulness. In faithfulness, you've afflicted me.

God started his psalm by appealing to God's faithfulness, but note how he humbly acknowledged God's righteousness in verse 4.

Listen to him in verse 4. Against you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so you are right.

[17:14] You are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. Now, even an earthly parent who's concerned about his or her child's waywardness will rightly punish their child in some way for doing what is wrong.

So it's not surprising that a righteous, faithful God will chasten his children for not living according to the family standards displayed perfectly in Christ.

See the point that if we're not living as Christ, we're not living up to the standards of that holy, righteous, just, faithful God.

And so, if you're a Christian, you must not be surprised if the Lord corrects you. The Bible tells us no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful.

Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who've been trained by it. David was chastened but spiritually exercised by what he suffered.

[18 : 35] He didn't ignore his sufferings and brush them off as being of no account. He didn't make light of the Lord's discipline. He humbly acknowledged you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.

The Lord does not change. The righteous, faithful, sin-hating, sin-forgiving God of the Old Testament is the same as the righteous, faithful God of the New Testament. He remains the same eternally, unchanging, He's the same God today. This is why He takes sin seriously today.

This is why He takes your sin and my sin seriously today. You should take your sin seriously too and not make light of His chastening or pretend that God doesn't care about your obedience. Don't think that God is indifferent to your unrighteousness. He is a righteous God. The prophet Nathan had earlier boldly rebuked his friend David and I think they were friends and it must have felt like the thrust of a sword into David's heart when Nathan rebuked him.

[20 : 01] Because, of course, the word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates to the dividing of soul and spirit, joints and marrow.

It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nathan was God's mouthpiece. He faithfully represented God in his words and actions.

A proverb says, Faithful are the rebukes of a friend. And his words hurt David and brought dreadful conviction to David.

David was wounded. Don't know if any of you ever read Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon was a master of illustrations.

And in one of his sermons, he referred to the spot of hunting. And he referred to a stag that had been wounded, not killed.

[21 : 05] And he said, such a stag wanders off, finds a lonely place to bleed in secret. Now that's what was going on with David.

David was bleeding in secret. He'd been hurt and embarrassed by Nathan. He knew that he'd actually hurt and embarrassed others.

But can you picture him in the secret place, pouring his heart out to God against you? You only have I sinned.

If you haven't seen your sin as being primarily against God, his word has never really penetrated your heart.

And your heart is hard and stony, impenetrable, so even the word of God isn't penetrating it. You're in a desperate condition if you've never been brought to that point of saying, against you, you only have I sinned.

[22 : 13] Now can you feel David's emotions? I wonder if you've got a problem with God being faithful and just at the same time.

His everlasting faithfulness and justice are displayed to all in the sufferings of the righteous Lord Jesus Christ on the cross.

In fact, all the glory of God was demonstrated there at the cross. It's there that not only his faithfulness and his justice were demonstrated, but also his love, compassion, mercy, justice, the whole glory of God was manifested there at the cross.

I wonder if you've been there. I wonder if you've contemplated the glory of God being displayed at the cross and you've beheld his justice, you've beheld his mercy, his love, his kindness, his compassion there at the cross.

Have you been to Calvary? It's a question that was asked quite frequently some decades ago. Have you contemplated the cross? Have you contemplated how the righteousness and the faithfulness of God met there at the cross?

[23 : 32] First of all, the justice of God. Paul, writing to the Roman Christians, spoke of, chapter 3, verse 26, Paul spoke of God being just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

There we've got the righteous, just God. The explanation is given in the previous verse. God presented Christ as the sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of his blood.

The word atonement is to do with satisfaction. God's justice was satisfied at Calvary because Jesus shed his blood there.

Sin was punished at Calvary. And Paul continued to write about the awesome justice of God.

Romans, chapter 8, verse 3, God sent his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering and so he condemned sin in the flesh.

Not his sin, of course. He was perfectly innocent. No one found any fault in him. So whose sin was it that was being judged there at Calvary?

[24 : 56] Paul said in 2 Corinthians our sin was judged in the one who has made sin for us. God laid on him the iniquity of us all.

The prophet Isaiah hundreds of years before Jesus came into this world prophesied like this. He said that he, the servant, the righteous servant of God took our pain and bore our suffering yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted.

But it wasn't for his sins. He was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Justice was there at Calvary. Justice at faithfulness because Isaiah prophesied this hundreds of years before the event.

Isaiah proclaiming the word of God, what God was going to do, always faithful to his promises, that faithfulness was brought about when Jesus died.

[26 : 20] Justice, faithfulness and love were demonstrated in the sufferings of Jesus. Paul, again, writing to the Romans, chapter 5, verse 8, God demonstrates his own love for us in this.

While we're still sinners, Christ died for us. If you want to see the love of God, consider the sufferings of Christ. Justice, yes, but love too.

The Apostle John wrote this, this is how God showed his love among us, he sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him.

This is love. If you want to know what love is, this is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Now, unlike David, unlike us, sorry, David hadn't got access to the words of Isaiah. Isaiah preached years, many years after David, didn't have the privilege like we have of being able to look back upon the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the redemption he achieved on the cross.

[27 : 41] David was able to look back like John and Peter, but David nonetheless recognized the faithfulness and justice of God.

He was convinced in his own mind that God was willing to forgive his sins because of God's everlasting love. He knew the Lord and he trusted the Lord to blot his sins out and remove his guilt and in his prayer of contrition he prayed that God would blot out his transgressions.

And if you're a Christian, don't you do just what David did when he was burdened with the sense of his sin, his guilt? I'm sure that you grasp the promises of God like that one found in 1 John that I spoke about to the children.

If we confess our sins he's faithful and just. See the two words coming together there. If we confess our sins he's faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

When you come to God confessing your sins you recognize that God is faithful to his promises. But you also recognize that God is just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus.

[29 : 04] He is faithful and just to forgive your sins and doesn't stop there does it? He's faithful and just to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

God forgives and he cleanses. If you like he acts as a judge and acquits you but he's also a doctor who deals with that which is wrong inside.

He cleanses you within. He performs surgery on your heart. David knew he needed forgiveness and cleansing.

Listen how he prays for inward change. Verse 1 verse 2 sorry cleanse me from my sin. Verse 10 create in me a pure heart oh God and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Verse 12 grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. Now David was brutally honest with himself. David was free to record in the psalm that his problem was very much deeper than him just doing things which were wrong.

[30 : 28] Look at verse 5 surely I was sinful at birth sinful from the time my mother conceived me. He was willing to see things as they really are.

He didn't blame his circumstances. He didn't blame others for his sin. He blamed himself. He didn't regard his sins as slips or mistakes.

You know when politicians confess they're wrong in public they say well I made a mistake I made a mistake I'm like that with David.

He knew there was something seriously wrong inside. He didn't just look for forgiveness of sins either. It would be mocking God for David to pray for forgiveness without praying for the Lord to

change him.

To change his inward attitudes, his desires. David prayed for forgiveness and for cleansing. And when we confess our sins we want forgiveness and change.

[31 : 37] Forgiveness and cleansing. Remember last Sunday evening Peter Robinson preached on Numbers chapter 19 and the description of the water of cleansing.

Remember how the ashes of a heifer were mingled with hyssop. How strange. The ashes of a sacrificed heifer mingled with hyssop and with other things and then mixed with water and used to ceremonially cleanse those people that were unclean.

Just look at verse 7. David prays, cleanse me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

If your heart and your conscience feel unclean then you need to be washed. That sense of failure and filth needs to be cleansed first of all.

And then Peter Robinson reminded us of a verse in Hebrews. Hebrews 9 verse 11. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean, sanctify them so that they're outwardly clean.

[32 : 56] How much more then will the blood of Christ who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God.

If you feel completely trapped and enmeshed in your sin you don't have the freedom to worship God. You don't have the freedom to serve God. And that cleansing is met by coming to Christ. And he cleanses our conscience so that we may serve the living and the true God. So are you in Bunyan's Slough or Despond?

In that bog? Have you sunk in the mire? Does the mud of sin and guilt so stick to you that you cannot serve God? You haven't got a mind or an attitude to serve God.

Certainly not to serve God joyfully. You need to be set free from your bad conscience. Only then will you have the liberty and the freedom to joyfully serve the Lord.

[34 : 10] David had expectations that in faithfulness God would and could renew him. One thing he longed for and had lost was joy.

Joy in the Lord's salvation. Look how he put it in verse 11. Do not cast from me your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation.

David knew that as a consequence of his sin he had lost any sense of joy in the Lord. And the principle of serving the Lord is that we know the joy of the Lord.

In Nehemiah the joy of the Lord is our strength. David had lost joy in the Lord. He felt weak. He grieved the Holy Spirit.

He lacked joy and spiritual strength. Don't you find it hard to bear burdens without joy?

[35 : 10] Hard to praise the Lord if you're not rejoicing in him. It's hard to resist temptation if your religion is joyless. It's easy to complain if you lack joy.

If you lack joy in the Lord you don't feel that you want to share the gospel with others. I wonder if you've been reading that book, the book, chapter two about joy.

Wednesday we're looking at that problem of joy and what happens if you haven't got it. It's a trail if you like. Come along on Wednesday night and find out all about joy and what happens if you haven't got it.

How important it is to have Christian joy. Well David went on in verse 14, Then I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will turn back to you.

David knew that if the Lord answers his prayer for inward cleansing and good conscience he'd have a story to tell others. What a story of forgiveness he would have.

[36 : 18] said. But sadly a sense of guilt still hung over him. He had a cloud hanging over him. He continued to trust in God his saviour but listen to him in verse 14.

Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed oh God you who are God my saviour. There was still a struggle going on. He wasn't healed easily.

David desperately wanted to know the blessedness of those whose sins had been forgiven but he was a broken man. He didn't have confidence in anything or anyone else who could help him.

Religious ritual and services couldn't help him. See how he put it in verses 16 and 17. You do not delight in sacrifice or I bring it.

You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice oh God is a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart you will not despise.

[37 : 28] Does that remind you of the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount? Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

righteousness. In his distress David had been liberated from any self confidence. He definitely couldn't be accused of self righteousness.

But he was beginning to come to his senses and his prayers were not self centered. Verse 18 Be pleased to prosper Zion.

Zion. He was now Zion centered. He was looking for the blessing of God's people and the honor of God's name which he brought dishonor to.

So have you repented? Have you trusted in God's faithfulness? Have you acknowledged his perfect justice?

[38 : 34] Have you seen your life in a different way? Seen your need of forgiveness and cleansing? Have you begun to turn around from being self orientated and now want to joyfully serve God?

Doing all in your power to show forth God's salvation to others and seeking the prosperity of the people of God. That's repentance.

Read Psalm 51. Meditate on Psalm 51. Ask yourself have you repented? Are you one who continually repents?

Let's pray. Gracious God, we acknowledge that we do indeed fall short continually of what we should be.

We thank you that you are faithful. We thank you that you do forgive sins. and we thank you for your Holy Spirit. Thank you that you will keep us to the end because you are faithful and you will do it.

[39 : 43] So we give our thanks to you in our Saviour's name. Amen. And we'll sing again about God, his greatness, strength that we've got in him.

647, In Christ alone my hope is found. Let's rise to sing 647. God, let's rise verse Oh, let's rise heard in the winter Sigh in deer Him Readyops orselling Twitter hint bless and half