

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: 19 September 2015

Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 0 0] Again, if you have a Bible to hand, then I'm going to think a little bit about that psalm, that song really, which is, or prayer of King David, Psalm 51, and just think a little bit about what we're doing here this afternoon as well. We all know the saying, actions speak louder than words. It goes along with that other very common expression, talk is cheap. Both those sayings imply, of course, that the reality of what we say is in what we do. The only way that we can be certain that the claims of somebody's mouth are true is if those claims are backed up by actions, by doing. It's only then, of course, that our words can be fully believed. So we have it with politicians who make claims before an election. We promise that we'll do this if we're elected.

Well, we can only be sure that what they've said is true when they do what they've said they will do afterwards. And so it is with each one of us. We may make promises, we may say things about what we believe or what we think about ourselves and so on, but only when we actually act upon those things and carry out what we've said we will do, can we really be believed and trusted. So being baptized, this act of baptism with water, a person is backing up their words saying that they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with action. That's the act. Of course, being baptized is not the only evidence that a person is a follower of Jesus Christ. Our whole lives are to be a continual witness, a continual living out what we say that we believe that Jesus has done in us. But baptism is, with water, is a command that Jesus has given to all those who put their faith and trust in him. And therefore, if we are truly his, we'll do what he commands us to do in being baptized. It's part of a promise, in one sense, of ongoing faithfulness, of living out what we believe. So what does being baptized mean?

What's the point of it? What is it necessary? What are these two men doing here this afternoon in being baptized? What are they saying is true about themselves and about God by this act of baptism?

Well, that's the reason I want us to think about Psalm 51. It's one of many places we could turn to in the Bible that talks about what it means to know God and be in a relationship with him.

And though David's prayer here isn't about baptism, it talks about the things that baptism symbolizes. The picture that we see here, and going to see here, the reality which is true of God.

[2 : 5 3] So what did David believe which holds true for every Christian, and in fact is true for every person? Well, the first thing that David acknowledges here, and those who've been baptized acknowledge, is that they need to be cleansed and washed from their sin.

Wash me, verse 2, or wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin, says King David. The Bible makes it very clear, as David makes it clear here, that every single person is a sinner.

Every single person is born with a compulsion to do the things that are selfish, to do the things that please us. We aren't born with a compulsion to obey God, rather we're born with a desire, with a leaning, with a tendency to disobey God, to disobey authority in that sense, but particularly God.

To act selfishly at the cost of others. And so David continues, I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me. In other words, in all that I do, I can see selfishness, pride, greed, and so on going on. We can easily, of course, witness the consequences of human sin in the world today. Open your newspaper, your magazine, turn on the telly, and there before us is war, violence, crime, greed, gossip, hatred, jealousy, and so on. We can list and list and list and list, whether it's in soap operas or in real life. There it is. Human sin, human selfishness, human disobedience to God, human rebellion against the way that God has made us to do the things which are right and good for one another. And if we are honest, as David is honest here, with ourselves, even if we're not so honest with others, if we're honest with ourselves, we can't help but acknowledging that sin is part of our lives too. We know it's there. We don't maybe call it sin, but that's what it is. It's part of us. And when, as God says in another part of the Bible, everybody has sinned and fallen short of God's standards, then we recognize that God is quite right in saying so. As David acknowledges here, he says, against you, God, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight. So you're proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

So when God says, yes, we've all sinned, if we're honest before him and ourselves, we have to say, yes, that's true. That's part of my life. That's part of who I am. That's the way I've behaved, even though I didn't like it, even though I still don't like it. It's there and I can't really get rid of it. But you see, the devastating consequences of our sin, and they are devastating in the world around about us, are just part of the problem. In fact, there's a much greater need. There's something even more important that sin has done in our lives. See, sin has placed us at odds with God.

[6 : 01] sin has placed us in opposition to God. God is good. God is holy. God does not do anything ever wrong.

But we are sinful. We are selfish. We are wicked. We're greedy. We're all those things. In one sense, we are diametrically opposed to God. And so by our sin, by our selfishness and pleasing ourselves, we're proving the fact that we're opposed to God, that we hate God. We don't like his laws. We don't like him telling us what to do. We don't like him telling us that we're sinners and we've got it wrong.

We hate that. And ultimately, that means we hate him. And therefore, we've become enemies of God. We've set ourselves against God. We've said, no, the person who is God in my life is me, not you.

The person who calls the shots, the person who makes the rules is me. And therefore, God is right angry with us. And just to be angry with us and angry with that sin. Just as we are angry when people sin against us and do things against us where they steal from us or hurt us or gossip about us or lie to us.

God is much more pure and holy than we are. Then his anger is much greater than ours. And so the problem is, and this is what Mike and Caleb are saying and what David is saying here is, I'm a sinner and I need to get right with God and I can never be right with God unless this sin is removed.

[7 : 39] That's the problem with our world. That's the problem with us. Many people say there is no God anymore, so we don't need to worry about it. And many of us say, well, I can't see God. Where is God in the world? What's going on? But the reason that we don't see God in the world, the reason that we don't sense him, ultimately is because that sin has created this tremendous gap between us, separated us from him.

So that we cannot see him for who he is. Doesn't mean he's not there. Just like the cloud covers the sun. It's been beautiful today, but when the cloud covers the sun, it doesn't stop the sun from being there.

You can't see it. So just as our sin covers over, in one sense, the very love and faithfulness and goodness of God, it doesn't stop God being faithful and good. You would call anybody mad, wouldn't you, if they said when the cloud was over the sun, there was no such thing as sun, or sun had disappeared.

So just a fool would say, because of our sin, God no longer exists, and God isn't there. So being baptized is saying, I'm a sinner, and I need to be cleansed of my sin, but wonderfully being baptized is stating and declaring that God has cleansed them of sin. God has washed away their sins. God has forgiven their sins. Verse 7, this is what David says, cleanse me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. He's trusting and looking to God to cleanse and to take away the sin, to forgive him. Really, who can take away sin? Who can forgive sin? Since, as David says rightly, when we sin, we sin against God, it's only God who can forgive us. A priest can't forgive us. Another man can't forgive us. We certainly can't forgive ourselves, just as we can't cleanse ourselves from the stain of sin, from the consequences of the actions of our sin. And the big problem, of course, is this, is that although our sinfulness, our selfishness, our greed, and all those things are often seen on the outside, where do they come from? What's the source of their pollution, as it were? Well, it's our own hearts. It's from within. Jesus himself said such a thing when he was talking to people who were saying about getting clean, getting washed, getting right with God. They were saying, well, if you do these things, that's what makes you wrong with God. No, he has said this, out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what makes a person unclean. But eating with your hands unwashed isn't what makes you unclean. It's out of our heart, your heart and mine. Who can wash the heart? You can't take your heart out and clean it. You can't clean your mind or your conscience. You just can't do that, but God can. What we cannot do, God can do. And that's exactly what the Christian is saying in being baptized. God's done this for me. We're rejoicing in the fact that God has washed us and cleansed us from our sins, and he's done it through Jesus Christ. Not with the water. They may come out a bit cleaner than they went in when they get in the water, but it won't clean the inside by in that water.

That doesn't make them right or anybody else right with God or wash away sin. The most powerful cleansing agent in the world is needed. Not Daz or Purcell, but the Bible says the very blood of Jesus.

[11 : 14] Here's what the Apostle John wrote in one of his letters. He said this, the blood of Jesus, God's Son, purifies us from all sin. Now, on the surface, that sounds rather sort of gothic, put it that way. Be washed in blood. A bit of a hammerhouse horror film, isn't it?

It's something a bit awful. But that's not really what John is meaning. When the Bible talks about being washed and cleansed by the blood of Christ, it means that by the death of Jesus Christ, in which he died and his blood was shed, we are made right with God. By Jesus dying in our place as the substitute, taking the blame we deserve, taking the punishment that is ours, God forgives us.

It's like perhaps when you were at school and you and your friend were playing and kicking football and your friend kicks the ball and it smashes the window.

Because he's your friend, you take the blame. Because you know that he's been in trouble before and if he gets in trouble again, he's going to be expelled from school or get into real bother. So you say, no, I'll take the blame. I didn't kick it, but I'll say I did so that you can get off scot-free.

Now there's a lie involved in that. We're not talking about a lie or a deception here. But we are talking about Jesus Christ willingly, purposefully taking the blame for our sins and taking the punishment for our sins. You see, if God called for you and I to bear the punishment our sins deserve, there is only one punishment. It's everlasting separation from God in hell.

[13 : 00] Jesus spoke a lot about it, more about hell than he did about heaven. To be separate from God in this world is to be separate from God in the world to come. We aren't just here for a few years and then we die. We're here and then we enter into eternity.

Life is more than just what we see and feel and touch. You and I were created in God's image that we might be those who live eternally. Sinners ruined that, destroyed that.

But God in his love has said, even though you've sinned against me and rebelled against me and even though you've turned away from me and you've done your own thing, I'm willing to forgive you.

I'm willing to cleanse you from that sin. I'm willing to cleanse you from that past because I've sent my son without sin to die in your place, to be judged in your place.

And because Jesus Christ was both man and God, he could die as a substitute for a countless number of people. That's who he is.

[14 : 03] That's why it's necessary for him to come from heaven to earth. That's why it's necessary for him to come as the son of God and become a human being. That God no longer holds our sin against us.

That's the assurance that both Caleb and Mike have. That assurance that Jesus has washed them from their sins. Baptism is that outward symbol, that picture of what God has done for every Christian on the inside.

Forgiveness and being right with God, washed and cleansed. And thirdly, in being baptized, the Christian is saying, my life is no longer for myself, but my life is lived for God and for his glory.

That's why as David goes through this psalm, he talks a lot about his sin. He talks about his sin being all the way there in his life. He talks about asking God to forgive him and cleanse him from his sin.

But then he goes on to speak about how out of that will come a life lived to glorify and praise and honor God. My tongue will sing of your righteousness.

[15 : 10] Oh Lord, open my lips. My mouth will declare your praise. Baptism is a sign of a new start. A new beginning in the life of a person.

That new beginning, it doesn't begin with baptism. It began when they put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. That's why the Bible talks about becoming a Christian as being born again.

Becoming a new creation. Having a brand new start. God comes and meets with a person. There's a real dramatic, dynamic, transforming meeting with God.

David knew about this as well because he talks about the Holy Spirit being with him. A Christian is somebody who knows God's Spirit has come to them.

And they have been made new. They've been changed. They've been transformed. God lives within them and they live in relationship with God. And so they desire now to follow him.

[16 : 16] They desire now not only to trust him for their forgiveness of sins, but trust him for the whole of their lives. Once they lived to please themselves. Once they followed sin and its desires.

But now Christ has set them free from that. So that they want to and they do live following him. With Jesus as their king and the Lord of their lives. Their aim is to serve him.

Their aim is to please him. Not because they're afraid of him. Not because he holds a big stick over them. But because they love him. He loved them. And rescued and saved them from their sin and its consequences.

And out of love for him. They want to make known his wonderful truths. That's why David says, Then I will teach transgressors your ways. And sinners will turn back to you.

That I want to tell others. Just as Mike and Caleb were doing. Just as we're doing now. Just as in their baptism. They've invited you, their friends. Perhaps some of you are not Christians.

[17 : 17] Or haven't come to that same faith. And you're wondering what's going on. They're doing this because they want you to turn to God too. They want you to learn about this wonderful good news that is Jesus Christ.

And to put your faith and trust in him. That he can wash and cleanse you. That he can make life sense for you. That you can know what it is he has to say to you.

And so a Christian is somebody who worships. As David did. Open my mouth. I might praise you. Tells others of his goodness. That I will teach transgressors your ways. These are some of the ways that they show the genuineness of their faith.

Being baptized is part of that. But it's not the all. It's just a sign of what God has done for them. Why does the Bible teach us then that we have baptism?

If being a Christian is not about being baptized. If it doesn't make you a Christian. If it's when it's God has done. Then why be baptized at all? Well partly because God commands it. But God only commands things for our good.

[18 : 23] Every one of his commandments are for our good. They're not to party poop. They're not to stop us from enjoying life. They're to bring fullness of life to us. Now baptism is there as a help to us who are Christians.

So that we can picture what God has done for us. We're all a bit like that aren't we? We all like pictures. We all prefer books with pictures in them.

Not just words. Let's be honest. I love asterisks. And those sort of cartoon books. I love reading them. I do read other books as well. More theologically minded. Occasionally when I have to.

But we all love pictures. And so the picture is a promise for the Christian. But also it's a promise for you. Who's not a Christian. It's a picture that God is making to you. A promise that God is making to you.

Who's not a Christian. In one sense in this baptism. He's holding out a promise to everyone who's a sinner. And he's saying look. I'm willing to wash you. No matter how filthy your sin. No matter how many your sins.

[19 : 21] No matter how guilty your conscience. No matter how bad you feel about yourself. No matter what you've done in the past. I'm willing to wash it all away. I'm willing to forgive every part of it.

And so this picture of baptism is. God has given for you. Especially for you. Who's not a Christian this afternoon. He's offering you salvation. He's offering you his love.

He's offering you Jesus Christ. His son who died in your place. He's offering you to enter into this wonderful joy. Look how David describes what it means to be a Christian.

In verse 10. Create in me a pure heart. In other words. Take away my sinful heart. Oh God. Renew a steadfast spirit within me. Put within me. That newness of life.

Don't take me from your presence. No longer do I want to be separated from you. Take not your Holy Spirit from me. I want to know you daily. Restore to me. The joy of your salvation.

[20 : 23] And grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. Let me assure you of this. Whoever you are. Whatever your past. Whatever your background.

Whatever your baggage. Whatever you've been living for up to this point. Whatever your goals are. Your hopes are. Your dreams are for the future. None of them can hold a single light.

To what it means to be a Christian. And a follower of Jesus Christ. None of them will make sense of life. Or bring satisfaction to life. Or give hope in the face of death. Apart from faith in Jesus Christ.

God's son. Because there's nothing that compares. You were made for God. And in sin you've left. And fallen away from God. But God has made the way to be restored.

Whoever you are. If you will come and put your faith in Jesus Christ. Then he will do that thing for you. That he's done for Mike and for Caleb. And much more than you can ever imagine.

[21 : 21] He'll wash you and cleanse you. He'll make you right with himself. Make you a member of his family. Bring you into eternal life. I'm going to pray in a moment.

And part of that prayer is going to be a prayer for people who are not Christians. And if you want to pray that prayer. The prayer that's saying I want to be a Christian. I want to know God.

I want to know these things. And you pray that with me. In your heart. Before God. Nobody else needs to see it. Or know about it. But God will know about it. And if you want to talk to myself.

Or to somebody else you know is a Christian here. We can give you something to help you. To find out more about the Christian life. Or to think. Perhaps you've got questions. About this world. Why is there suffering?

Why? Where is God? Please come and speak to us about it. We believe that God has the answers. We don't have all the answers. God has them. And we'd be only too happy to help you.

[22 : 19] In finding out more. About this wonderful promise. Which baptism is a picture of. So let's pray together now. And after that we're going to.

Go through with the baptism itself. Well Lord our God. We thank you again. That we are known to you.

We thank you that. Though we may not know you. You know us completely. You know what we had for breakfast this morning. You know what we did last week at work. You know about the things that we said.

Behind somebody's back. You know everything Lord. We can't hide from you. And we thank you that we can't. We thank you that you know us so completely. Yet in spite of knowing us so completely. You still want to forgive us.

And you still want us to know you. And to be right with you. And in spite of knowing what we are like. You still sent your son. The Lord Jesus Christ. To come into this world.

[23 : 16] To rescue us and save us from our sins. And from hell. And the consequences of our sins. And Lord we do want to. Pray even now.

For those who are Christians here. That you would help us. Lord Jesus. To appreciate all that you've done for us. More and more. And help us to be people who. Don't just say it. But do it.

In the way that we live. To show the reality. And the power of your Holy Spirit's work in us. We do pray for those who are not Christians. Here this afternoon. That Lord Jesus.

You would open their minds and hearts. The things that they've heard. They would not just simply dismiss. As the ramblings of an idiot. But rather they would hear. That you are speaking to them. And that your desire is that they should know you.

And as I pray this prayer. Oh Lord. Those who pray it with me. I pray that you would hear them. And receive them. Not because. Of who they are. Not because they're good people.

[24 : 13] But because they know that they are sinners. And because Lord Jesus you died. Dear God. Thank you that.

In spite of my sin. You love me. And sent your son into this world. To rescue me. Forgive me for the way that I've lived.

Up until today. Wash me and cleanse me. From my sins. That have ruled my life. Thank you that Jesus your son died.

In my place. And I pray oh Lord. That you would come. And now be the God of my life. That you would turn me around.

From going my way. To go your way. And that you would give me that. Real faith. To trust you day by day. And your Holy Spirit's power.

[25 : 12] To live for you day by day. From now on. Amen. So we're going to have the baptism. Themselves.

If you want to come up a bit closer. We're going to move a few bits and pieces around. If those who are going to be baptized. Want to get their socks and shoes. And bits and pieces off. Or whatever. And Barry's going to go in the pool first.

With Mike. And then. Caleb. And his dad. And Barry a bit later on. We'll do it in a minute or two.

We're going to sing that through. Just the once. And then we'll do the same. After Caleb's been baptized. As well. Okay. So I'm going to hand over to Barry. He's one of the church leaders here.

And he's going to conduct the baptisms. Well what's going to happen. Just in case you don't know. Three questions are going to be asked. Of Michael and Caleb. And they'll answer each of those questions.

[26 : 10] And then after that. They'll be baptized. And there'll be two different forms. Michael's going to have water poured over him. And Caleb's going to be put under the water.

So you'll see two different forms. Michael. Come stand over here. Have you fully and truly repented. Of all the sins of your past life. Amen. Have you put your faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

Amen. Do you intend with God's help. To confess Christ before the world. Without shame. And to seek God's will first in your life. Amen. I'm professing your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And at your request. I baptize you. In the name of the Father. The Son. And the Holy Spirit. Thank you. Let's sing the song.

Just make sure you're here. Yeah. Let's sing. Jesus Christ is Lord.

[27 : 36] Let's sing. Let's sing.

Let's sing. Let's sing. Let's sing. Let's sing. Let's sing. Let's sing.

Caleb, have you fully and truly repented of all the sins of your past life? I have. Have you put your faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation?

I have. Do you intend with God's help to confess Christ before the world without shame and to seek God's will first in your life? I do. I'm professing your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And by your request, we baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He is God.

[28 : 50] He is God. He is risen from the dead and he is Lord.

Then we shall have every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Amen. We're going to close our time with prayer now. And again, can I encourage you to stay for some refreshments? But let us pray as we close. Father, we thank you again for the work you've done in Caleb and Mike's life.

We thank you for their desire to follow you and to show that publicly by being baptized. We pray for them that they might grow in their faith and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray that you would keep them and strengthen them in their faith, that they may always honor you, follow you, trust you, and love you. We pray for ourselves again, oh Lord, that what you have done in Caleb and Mike's life may be a reality for each one of us, that we may walk with you and enjoy you, the God who made us, because Jesus died and rose again.

[30 : 06] And we look forward to that day when he will come once more and we shall be with you forever and ever. Dismiss us then, oh Lord, we pray with your rich blessing. Keep us safe, those who travel, watch over us.

For we ask these things as we give you all our thanks and praise in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

[32 : 19] Thank you.