

PRAYER OF CONTRITION

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

Date: 23-01-2022

Scripture: Psalm 51 (NLT)

Today I want us to look at the prayer of David, and it's found in Psalm 51. I'd like to call this a prayer of contrition, or just David's prayer of confession or contrition.

Psalm 51

- ¹ *Have mercy on me, O God,
because of your unfailing love.
Because of your great compassion,
blot out the stain of my sins.*
- ² *Wash me clean from my guilt.
Purify me from my sin.*
- ³ *For I recognize my rebellion;
it haunts me day and night.*
- ⁴ *Against you, and you alone, have I sinned;
I have done what is evil in your sight.
You will be proved right in what you say,
and your judgment against me is just.*
- ⁵ *For I was born a sinner—
yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.*
- ⁶ *But you desire honesty from the womb,
teaching me wisdom even there.*
- ⁷ *Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*
- ⁸ *Oh, give me back my joy again;
you have broken me—
now let me rejoice.*
- ⁹ *Don't keep looking at my sins.
Remove the stain of my guilt.*
- ¹⁰ *Create in me a clean heart, O God.
Renew a loyal spirit within me.*
- ¹¹ *Do not banish me from your presence,
and don't take your Holy Spirit from me.*
- ¹² *Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and make me willing to obey you.*
- ¹³ *Then I will teach your ways to rebels,
and they will return to you.*
- ¹⁴ *Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves;
then I will joyfully sing of your forgiveness.*
- ¹⁵ *Unseal my lips, O Lord,
that my mouth may praise you.*
- ¹⁶ *You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one.
You do not want a burnt offering.*
- ¹⁷ *The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit.
You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.*

Let's pray together.

Our heavenly Father, You lead us now in the talks that we think, in the responses that we bring and to the actions that come out of that response. May they all be in perfect alignment with Your will. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Church, this is a psalm that you probably know very well, as well as the context of this prayer – David's sin with Bathsheba. In 2 Samuel 11, it says, *"In the spring of the year, when kings go out for fighting and for fame, David stayed at home."* And then we read that he saw Bathsheba and he lusted after her, sent for her. He slept her and then that whole sordid tale. It involved acting on the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh; involved exploiting and misusing the power that God had given him; involved a cover-up which failed. And then resulted in murder and the loss of Uriah, the Hittite, who was one of his thirty most valiant warriors.

James puts it in perspective when he talks about sin, and he says, *"But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desires, he is lured away and enticed. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers."*

But the cold hard fact is that David didn't repent of this sin immediately. He refused to accept it or even see it as sin. He continued on in this manner, doing what he wanted. As the psalm itself says, "It haunted me night and day." And yet, he continued to go on with his life. That's the nature of unconfessed sins or covered-up sins. The guilt remains. As David himself says in Psalm 32:3 *"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long."* 32:6 *Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found.*

It took him so long, haunted him day and night. He says, "My bones wasted away." And yet, that sin remained covered up and unconfessed, until one day, the prophet Nathan confronted him, told him a story. As David grew angry at the injustice of the story, Nathan said, "You are this person!" Psalms 51 and 32 captured David's response to sin and his response to God eventually.

So, let's look at this psalm and see what important points it reveals to us. Let's leave David in the annals of history where he belongs and look at ourselves.

Do we need to say this prayer?

Is there sin in our lives that is unconfessed? Is the guilt damning? Does it haunt you all the time? Is it making our lives less than we are, or even not allowing us to come to our full potential? Does it involve a cover-up? Are other people being exploited, hurt by our actions? Have we lost the joy, peace and the zest of living? Are you just existing, going through the motions, day in and day out? More importantly, are you tired of living in this barren place, lonely, guilt-ridden, and fruitless? A place where sin always leads us.

Beloved, if we are human, and we are, more often than not, we find ourselves in this place because of our stubbornness, because of the way we exploit power, the need for control, our unbridled tongue that speaks words that cut and hurt, our rampant runaway thoughts, our unchecked tempers, our covetous desires, our penchant to gossip. They all lead us to this place where David was. As one songwriter put it:

I thirsted in the barren land of sin and shame,
And nothing satisfying there I found.

Thirsty and yet nothing! No springs of living water! Until –
But to the blessed cross of Christ one day I came
Where springs of living water did abound.

So, if that's where you are right now, I want you to just stay focused and connected, because God is going to do an amazing thing to you through His Word.

Psalm 32 says this about continuing to live in sin: "When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me, my strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. Finally I confessed all my sins to You and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, 'I will confess my rebellion to the Lord' and You forgave me. All my guilt is gone."

Beloved, that's the place that I believe God wants to take us even today at this moment. So, as I've been speaking, if the Spirit of God has been pointing out areas that are unconfessed, that are giving you guilt, having your joy stolen away, then this sermon is for you. God wants to bring you out of a barren place, to be drinking from springs of living water, through this prayer of confession and contrition that David has given to us in Psalm 51.

So, let's look at this psalm, look at this prayer and see some of the components of this prayer. While there are four areas, I really want us to focus on one area which is where I find different parts of this prayer that are so necessary for us to move from this place of barrenness to the place of living water.

1. What is the basis for this prayer?

- God's unfailing love. The basis is found in vs. 1 itself. *"Because of Your unfailing love and because of Your great compassion, have mercy on me."* Because of God's unfailing love. Romans 8:39 reminds us, *"Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* Nothing can separate you and me from God's incredible unfailing love.
- God's great compassion. He says, *"Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love, because of your great compassion."*
We see this picture of the prodigal son – of the great compassion that God has for those who have wandered away, got into some kind of sin, and when they repent and come back, it says, *"and he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion and ran and embraced and kissed him."*
God's compassion is so great towards you and me, His children.

2. What is the prerequisite for this prayer?

- We need to acknowledge that sin is rebellion against God. He says, *"Against you, you alone have I sinned. I have done what is evil in your sight."* I have rebelled against your will, against you. I have gone against your interests in my life.

Remember beloved, God wants the best for you and me. Sometimes we allow the carnal side of us to pull us away. The lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life – and that's not part of God's will. It's a rebellion against what God wants.

- We acknowledge that sin is evil in God's sight. God is so pure that He cannot see this sin. It is evil to Him. There are over 49 occurrences in the Old Testament with the phrase that the people were doing evil in the sight of the Lord, or evil in the eyes of the Lord.

The first step in turning around and moving away from this place of wilderness, this place of barrenness – saying that I acknowledge Lord, that my sin is against You and I acknowledge that it is evil in Your sight. To be able to see sin for what it is, is the first step as we come to Him.

3. What is the effect of this prayer?

It moves us from this place of being haunted night and day to eventually rejoicing, singing joyfully. It says in vs. 15 – *Unseal my lips O Lord, that my mouth may praise You.*

Vs. 13 – *Then I will teach Your ways to rebels and they will return to You.*

As we experience forgiveness, we speak about it, we tell others that they don't need to be at this place of barrenness, this dead place. But there is another place to be – in the beauty of God's presence and His love. And then we sing about it.

What a difference! We talk about 'my bones were rotting away. I was being haunted night and day.' And then this place of just singing joyfully. It a night and day contrast, from acknowledging sin and being freed from it.

COMPONENTS OF THIS PRAYER

I. We bank on God's mercy.

We come because of His love and His unfailing compassion, but we come asking for mercy. God has said that the wages of sin is death. That's what we deserve. And yet, when we come to Him, we can plead for mercy. I say we can, because we are told actually that we can come boldly into His presence, to the throne of our gracious God and there we will receive His mercy and we will find grace. So, "Have mercy upon me," is the only cry out of our lips when we come before Him with our sins, because in our sins, we have transgressed God's law. And His word is clear: The wages of sin is death.

So, we come asking for mercy. Have mercy on me, O God. We too, bring these words as we draw close to Him. Have mercy on me, O God.

II. Cleansing, Restoration & Renewal

We invite Him to blot out our sin, wash the guilt away and to purify us. The Psalmist reminds us in Psalm 103:12 that God is able to do this. *As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*

Beloved, He can take it away. He can blot it out of our lives. Then we invite Him to wash the guilt away, because it is the guilt that steals our joy and peace as it keeps coming back as unconfessed sin. It is guilt that is the residue that makes us so unhappy.

Psalm 32:5 says, *"I acknowledge my sin to You and my iniquity I did not hide. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and You forgave the guilt of my sin."* So, look to Him and say, "Lord, would You take away this guilty feeling that I have? Would You completely justify me?"

Purify me O Lord. Often the sins that we commit determine the way we look at ourselves. When we look at ourselves through these kinds of lenses, then we see ourselves as impure, dirty, unclean, a useless person, because we see it through the lenses of our sin. That's why we need to be purified so we see ourselves not through the lens of our sin but through the eyes of our Maker. We see ourselves as His workmanship, His masterpiece, His bride. So, we come to Him for cleansing – blot out sins, take away guilt, purify.

We ask for restoration and renewal. We ask Him to restore the joy of His salvation. One of things that immediately goes away when we sin is the fellowship that we have. When fellowship is stolen from a relationship, joy exits the window. So we say, "Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation." You have saved me, You have redeemed me. The heritage that I have today is of a joyful person; give that back to me. Restore to me Your will, Your purposes, Your plans. It's been too long Lord, living in the dungeon, living away from You, living in this joyless place. Restore unto me the joy that belongs to a child of Yours.

Then renew a loyal spirit within me. Bring back the loyalty, a steadfast spirit. I like the word 'loyal' here. We don't often use it in relationship with God. When we talk about God, we say, "We love you, we adore you, we honor you, we care for you," and all of those things. But are we loyal to Him? What is being loyal? Being firm, not changing in our friendship with Him, or support for Him, or in our belief, or the principles that we have in Him. Being loyal to Him in the face of whatever enticements or allurements Satan may bring to us, we are loyal to the King of kings and the Lord of lords. So he says, "Restore to me joy and renew this spirit of loyalty that I must have with You."

III. He names the sin.

He says, "Forgive me," in vs.14, "for shedding blood, O God who saves." I think it is important for us to name the sins when we confess to God, to be specific. In essence, to bring it out of darkness into light, because God is light. We bring it out and say, "Lord, this is what I have done, O Lord. Shed Your light upon it and take away this sin. Cleanse me and purify me. Forgive me O Lord, for this thing." Beloved, I think that is important for us as we ask Him all of these things. We invite His forgiveness and we say, "Lord, in this area that I have transgressed, will You forgive me?"

IV. Contrition.

We need to come with contrition, repenting, full of remorse for what we have done, asking for His forgiveness. Not proudly, but knowing exactly what we have done. We have rebelled; we've done what is evil. God, forgive us please! Come repenting. Sackcloth and ashes, as the Old Testament put it – that kind of remorse. Come to Him and say, "Lord, I am so sorry for what I have done. Will You forgive me?"

Repentance as we know, is turning 180 degrees away from that sin and walking away from darkness into God's wonderful light. So, we come before Him broken. "Humble and contrite heart O God, you will not despise."

The Joy that Follows.

Psalm 32, another psalm that David wrote at the same time that he wrote psalm 51, gives us this good news. "*O what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight.*" What joy! Joy – that thing that has eluded you for so long is now being offered to you. Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived now in complete honesty. What joy!

The Promise.

The Lord says: *I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. Don't be like the senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control. Many sorrows come to the wicked but unfailing love surrounds those who trust the Lord. so, rejoice in the Lord and be glad, all you who obey Him. Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure.*

That's what God offers to you and me at this time – to be able to come clean, to move away from this barren wilderness, this place where joy has long gone, and to come into a place of light, of forgiveness, of cleansing, of purification, of guilt being taken away and joy being poured back, a renewal, a restoration. All of that, yours and mine, right now, if we will turn to Him and say, "Have mercy on me, O God."

Beloved, my prayer is that you will go through this psalm and that each of these components will become yours. Either now with the singing of our hymn, or later in solitude – say this prayer. Come to Him and say, Lord, have mercy. Lord, would You clean house, take away the guilt, purify me, restore me, renew me? Lord, forgive me for this thing. Lord, I come broken to You. O Lord, restore unto me the joy of Your salvation. I'm Your child Lord. would You give me back plans and purposes that You have? I want them for their joy. Flood my heart.

My prayer is that today, if this sermon was for you, that you will walk away from that place of barrenness into a place of beauty and light and joy.

Shall we pray?

Our Father, we come to you broken. We come to you contrite, Lord, acknowledging our sin. We ask Lord, that You would receive us in Your mercy because of Your unfailing love and Your compassion. We pray Lord, for each one who is responding to You right now. Lord, would You cleanse, would You take away guilt, would You purify, restore, renew and give back a heart of joy. We pray in the beautiful name of Jesus, because of whom these things are available to us. Amen.