

Psalm 51-55 Chapter Study

## Psalm 51

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David When Nathan the Prophet Went to Him, After He Had Gone in to Bathsheba.

[Tell story – 2 Sam 12]

<sup>1</sup> Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your loving-kindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions.

This is the cry of a broken man.

His brokenness is much more than mere regret over unfortunate circumstances.

The reality of how far he's gone from God has come home to him & he's ruined!

You see, this is the same man who'd earlier said –

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after.

To behold the beauty, of the Lord.

To dwell in His presence, all the days of my life.

There was a time before Bathsheba, when being close to God was David's chief passion, his all-consuming desire.

Nathan's challenge caused David to realize how far from God he'd drifted.

Like someone lying in a boat tied to the pier who falls asleep to the gentle rocking of the waves.

But the rope slips from the cleat, and the tide goes out, carrying the boat with it.

When that sleep awakes 3 hours later, they are out to sea with no land in sight.

David is lost in a sea of moral & spiritual ruin.

He knows he deserves God's wrath for the terrible things he's done.

His awareness of that suggests to us that while he was pursuing Bathsheba & conspiring to get rid of her husband, the voice of conscience was resisting. But he pressed on anyway.

Desperate to return to where he needs to be with God, David threw himself on God's mercy.

He says, "Show mercy according to the measure of Your **loving-kindness**."

Loving-kindness is the Hebrew word **hesed**.

Hesed means mercy, but it's **committed** to the one to whom it's given.

There's a strong element of **loyalty** in hesed.

That's why some translations render hesed as **loyal-love**, or **steadfast mercy**.

David pleads with God to bestow a mercy drawn from what he knows is God's unchanging commitment to their relationship.

David knows he's been unfaithful to God, but God remains faithful.

It's that faithfulness, that loyalty to their covenant that so overwhelms David with grief over what he's done.

As Paul later says in Romans 2:3 – It's the **goodness** of God that leads us to repentance.

SO David in humble brokenness asks God to erase his sin & remove what stands in the way of renewed fellowship with Him.

<sup>2</sup> Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin.

David doesn't just want the guilt removed; certainly he wants that.

But more – he wants the inner weakness that allowed such a terrible thing to happen healed, removed, expunged from his soul.

<sup>3</sup> For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin *is* always before me.

There's no attempt now to cover up or justify his sin.

He'd tried to do that by having Uriah killed. But there's not hiding sin.

Because you can't hide it from yourself.

You see – David has come face to face with an awful realization.

Nathan's challenge has made him see the terrible truth – no man is more deceived than he who's deceived himself.

Until Nathan came, David had been walking in a moral & spiritual stupor.

He thought he'd fooled everyone, including God, because he'd successfully gotten rid of Uriah & brought Bathsheba to his house.

Only a select group of his closest associates knew the truth – David thought.

Turns out, many knew what was going on.

Most importantly – God knew, and sent Nathan to bust David.

When Nathan said “You’re the man!” David realized what he thought was a secret *wasn’t*.

Not by a long shot.

He understood in a flash that he’d constructed himself a convenient house of cards, then moved in.

But now, all the cards have fallen & everyone knew the truth.

This is the great danger of *living in sin*.

The only way to do it without being consumed by guilt is to deceive yourself.

You have to tell yourself the lie that you’re fine & surround yourself with as many false supports for that as you can.

But if you *willing lie to yourself* – you make yourself the victim of any & all deceit.

David came to the place where he could no longer duck the sin he’d committed – and says,

. . . my sin *is* always before me.

<sup>4</sup> Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done *this* evil in Your sight—That You may be found just when You speak, *And* blameless when You judge.

The measure of David’s conviction is revealed here.

He sees that the ultimate sin, the greatest error he’d made, wasn’t committing adultery or murder – it was willfully breaking God’s commands.

Adultery & murder are wrong because God says so.

Before he ever lay with Bathsheba or gave the order for Uriah’s death, he made the inner decision to do what he wanted to do rather than what he KNEW God said to do.

David is not making light of his sin of adultery & murder.

He’s not in any way *diminishing* the seriousness of his sin against Bathsheba & Uriah.

On the contrary – they were terrible crimes precisely because God said they were!

If David had remained faithful to God, none of this would ever have happened!

And he realized, that unless Nathan had challenged him, how much farther might he have gone?

During the Nuremberg Trials, a Jew who’d survived the death camps sat in the gallery watching the trial of the Nazis who’d presided over the Holocaust.

He wept quietly as the trial went on.

At the end of the day, a reporter asked him why he wept, if he was remembering the many who’d died so brutally in the camp.

The Jewish survivor said, “No, no; it’s not that. It was so easy for me to hate these men when they strutted round the camp. They’d seemed like giant monsters in their crisp uniforms & death’s head emblems. But now they’ve shrunk to mere men no different than I. But for the grace of God, it could be *me* who’s on trail here.”

That’s what David is saying in v. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Behold, I was brought forth [conceived] in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

He doesn’t mean that his mother had illicit relation with someone other than her husband.

He means that Adam’s fallenness was passed to him. We’re **ALL** born in sin.

<sup>6</sup> Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden *part* You will make me to know wisdom.

What’s needed to undo the grip sin has on us isn’t just an outward compliance with the Law.

We require an inner change that ends our bondage to sin.

We need to be cut loose from what we inherit in Adam’s Fall.

We aren’t sinners because we sin; we sin because we’re sinners.

Sin ends when God gives us a new nature.

<sup>7</sup> Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Hyssop was a plant they used when applying the blood of the sacrifices to the priest’s robes to sanctify them.

David uses this imagery as a way to ask for forgiveness.

<sup>8</sup> Make me hear joy and gladness, *That* the bones You have broken may rejoice.

I’ve never had a broken bone, but I understand that after the initial trauma, as it heals there’s a deep, deep ache.

That’s the idea here: The conviction of sin David’s known is like a deep ache – but one that’s worked to

heal him.

9 Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

“Bring me back to the way it was before.”

11 Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

The Holy Spirit had a different relationship to believers then that He does now.

Then – anointing for service, task.

When done, depart.

Of, as in case of Samson & Saul; disobey, withdraw.

Now, different; born-again, **permanent**.

But we can **grieve** the Spirit by not yielding ourselves to God. [Eph 4:30]

12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me *by Your* generous Spirit.

13 *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.

Forgiveness bestowed is the basis for a great testimony.

14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, The God of my salvation, *And* my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.

Nathan’s challenge revealed David’s sin of adultery; he said nothing of the murder though it was certainly implied.

The proof David is genuinely repentant is that he makes what was **implicit, explicit**.

He asks specifically for forgiveness for ordering Uriah’s death.

15 O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

16 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give *it*; You do not delight in burnt offering.

17 The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise.

Bringing an animal to the altar at the tabernacle was supposed to be only a **symbol** of a deeper, more personal inner work of confession & repentance.

Without that honest brokenness before God, sacrifices meant nothing.

18 Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem.

By **walls**, David really means the people of Jerusalem.

In the ancient world, walls were only as good as the people who made & manned them.

Many cities fell in battle because the people had not built them well or did not stand watch over them.

So really, walls were symbolic of the people who lived inside them.

David asked God to do the **same work** in the people of Jerusalem He’d done in David.

Then & only then would their city be safe.

19 Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, With burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.

## Psalm 52

To the Chief Musician. A Contemplation of David When Doeg the Edomite Went and Told Saul, and Said to Him, “David Has Gone to the House of Ahimelech.”

[Tell story – 1 Sam 22]

1 Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The goodness of God *endures* continually.

2 Your tongue devises destruction, Like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.

3 You love evil more than good, Lying rather than speaking righteousness. Selah

4 You love all devouring words, *You* deceitful tongue.

5 God shall likewise destroy you forever; He shall take you away, and pluck you out of *your* dwelling place, And uproot you from the land of the living. Selah

6 The righteous also shall see and fear, And shall laugh at him, *saying*,

7 “Here is the man *who* did not make God his strength, But trusted in the abundance of his riches, *And* strengthened himself in his wickedness.”

8 But I *am* like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever.

9 I will praise You forever, Because You have done *it*; And in the presence of Your saints I will wait on Your name, for *it is* good.

## Psalm 53

To the Chief Musician. Set to “Mahalath.” A Contemplation of David.

This Psalm is akin to Psalm 14 which we’ve already covered.

It’s the same words set to a different tune.

It shows what man is like when he rejects God.

1 The fool has said in his heart, “*There is* no God.” They are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity; *There is* none who does good.

2 God looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are *any* who understand, who seek God.

3 Every one of them has turned aside; They have together become corrupt; *There is* none who does good, No, not one.

4 Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge, Who eat up my people *as* they eat bread, And do not call upon God?

5 There they are in great fear *Where* no fear was, For God has scattered the bones of him who encamps against you; You have put *them* to shame, Because God has despised them.

6 Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When God brings back the captivity of His people, Let Jacob rejoice *and* Israel be glad.

While this seems a harsh diagnosis of humanity, it’s accurate.

The only reason there is any good & that people DO seek God is because ***He initiates it!***

Were it not for the grace & goodness of God, man’s sin & fallenness would prevail.

## Psalm 54

To the Chief Musician. With Stringed Instruments. A Contemplation of David When the Ziphites Went and Said to Saul, “Is David Not Hiding with Us?”

[I Sam 23 – hiding in dorests on east side of Jordan]

1 Save me, O God, by Your name, And vindicate me by Your strength.

This is such a great request!

David asks God to come through for him, but to do so in a manner that makes it clear God’s doing it.

In other words – David says, “Use my problems as a way to demonstrate Your glory!”

2 Hear my prayer, O God; Give ear to the words of my mouth.

3 For strangers have risen up against me, And oppressors have sought after my life; They have not set God before them. Selah

4 Behold, God *is* my helper; The Lord *is* with those who uphold my life.

5 He will repay my enemies for their evil. Cut them off in Your truth.

6 I will freely sacrifice to You; I will praise Your name, O Lord, for *it is* good.

7 For He has delivered me out of all trouble; And my eye has seen *its desire* upon my enemies.

Which was certainly the case with Saul, time & again.

He had several opportunities to kill Saul but never did, choosing instead to let God put him on the throne in His time & way.

## Psalm 55

To the Chief Musician. With Stringed Instruments. A Contemplation of David.

We're not certain what occasioned this Psalm but it seems clear David has been betrayed by a close friend.

1 Give ear to my prayer, O God, And do not hide Yourself from my supplication.

2 Attend to me, and hear me; I am restless in my complaint, and moan noisily,

3 Because of the voice of the enemy, Because of the oppression of the wicked; For they bring down trouble upon me, And in wrath they hate me.

4 My heart is severely pained within me, And the terrors of death have fallen upon me.

5 Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, And horror has overwhelmed me.

David is both ***deeply hurt & afraid***.

Because of ***both*** emotions, some commentators conclude it was the betrayal of his friend & counselor ***Ahithophel*** that prompted this.

6 So I said, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.

7 Indeed, I would wander far off, *And* remain in the wilderness. Selah

David & a small band of loyal supporters had to flee from Jerusalem out into the eastern wilderness.

They were pulling out of one side of town while his rebellious son Absalom was arriving on the other side.

There were men among Absalom's supporters who wanted to run David down & not let him get away. David wishes for wings to so he could escape.

8 I would hasten my escape From the windy storm *and* tempest."

9 Destroy, O Lord, *and* divide their tongues, For I have seen violence and strife in the city.

10 Day and night they go around it on its walls; Iniquity and trouble *are* also in the midst of it.

11 Destruction *is* in its midst; Oppression and deceit do not depart from its streets.

12 For *it is* not an enemy *who* reproaches me; Then I could bear *it*. Nor *is it* one *who* hates me who has exalted *himself* against me; Then I could hide from him.

13 But *it was* you, a man my equal, My companion and my acquaintance.

14 We took sweet counsel together, *And* walked to the house of God in the throng.

This lends weight to the idea that it was Ahithophel's defection to Absalom that sparked this Psalm.

Why David's good friend & wise counselor Ahithophel ***turned on him*** & plotted his death is one of the more fascinating studies in Scripture with tremendous lessons on the importance & urgency of forgiveness.

Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather!

While God forgave David and returned him to favor & blessing, Ahithophel never did forgive David but looked instead for a chance to get even, and joined Absalom's rebellion.

A great battle ensued & thousands of men lost their lives – all because Ahithophel allowed bitterness to consume him.

15 Let death seize them; Let them go down alive into hell, For wickedness *is* in their dwellings *and* among them.

16 As for me, I will call upon God, And the Lord shall save me.

17 Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, And He shall hear my voice.

18 He has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle *that was* against me, For there were many against me.

19 God will hear, and afflict them, Even He who abides from of old. Selah

Because they do not change, Therefore they do not fear God.

20 He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him; He has broken his covenant.

21 *The words* of his mouth were smoother than butter, But war *was* in his heart; His words were softer than oil, Yet they *were* drawn swords.

Absalom had been sowing the seeds of rebellion for a long time before he made a public break with his dad.

Ahithophel had been working secretly for Absalom inside the palace, feeding him inside information & hiding important intel about Absalom's activities from David.

Looking back now that Ahithophel's true colors were seen, David realized how he'd been set up.

But as much as Ahithophel's counsel to Absalom was a threat to David's safety, David knew God was in control.

So -

<sup>22</sup> Cast your burden on the Lord, And He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.

<sup>23</sup> But You, O God, shall bring them down to the pit of destruction; Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; But I will trust in You.