

Psalms

The Book of Praises

Lesson 8

Psalms of Penitence

Psalms of Penitence

- ❑ Psalm 51:2-3; 32:5; 25:6-7
- ❑ Penitence - “a sad and humble realization of and regret for one's sins.” (Webster)
- ❑ An abhorrence for sin
- ❑ Made no excuses for sin
- ❑ Ralph Walker article p. 65, 2nd paragraph



Lessons for Today

- ❑ Sin can exact a heavy toll on our heart if not dealt with properly.
- ❑ God does not want to hear our excuses for sin, only our penitence.
- ❑ The thing that God desires we offer Him, far more than any physical offering, is “a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart.”

Psalm 51

- Q3. What is the occasion on which this psalm was written according to the title?
 - When Nathan the prophet came to him after he had gone in to Bathsheba.
- Q4. Describe the emotions you see in David when he wrote this psalm.
 - Deeply grieved, penitent, hopeful, joyful over God's forgiveness.

Psalm 51

□ Summary

- Almost a revulsion at what he has become
- Admitting he can do nothing personally to reverse his perishing
- Knows nothing about “a little wickedness” (white lies, etc.)

□ Two elements to this psalm

- Confession
- Petition

Psalm 51

□ Outline

- The basic plea for pardon (vv. 1-2)
- The reasons on which this plea is based (vv. 3-6)
- The plea renewed in manifold detail (vv. 7-12)
- The resolve to offer grateful service to God (vv. 13-17)
- A prayer for the welfare of the holy city (vv. 18-19)

□ Vv. 1-2

- Pardon has its basis in God's goodness – lovingkindness and tender mercies
- “Blot out ...” – an account that is kept – wiped clean (Isa. 43:25; Ex. 32:31-33)

Psalm 51

- V. 3
 - 'I know how grievously I have sinned, and the thought of it clings to me night and day'
- V. 4 - Q5. Who does David say he sinned against? Is this true for us and in every case of sin?
 - God (v. 4). Yes.
 - All sin is seen to be great when it is understood as having been directed at none less than God
 - A truly penitent man in no way belittles his sin, nor does he overly exaggerate it
 - When excuses are offered, penitence is insincere

Psalm 51

- Q6. Explain v.5. Does this support the concept of original sin? (give some other references that refute this false doctrine)
 - Ezek. 18:20-21 "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son ..."
 - 1 Jn. 3:4 – "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness."
 - Could have been the circumstances of his birth – we don't have any information to support this
 - May mean in a broad sense – a world of sin. He is feeling so overwhelmed that it seems that sin is all around him throughout his life.
 - See also Ezek. 28:15; Eccl. 7:29

Psalm 51

□ V. 6

- Sets against sin what should be in his heart – “truth”
- “Our approach to God must be sincere and straightforward. To the best of our ability, we must really and truly want from God what our approach to Him seems to say that we want ... God is not to be mocked. He cannot be manipulated. There is no possibility of deceiving Him about our intentions when we come before Him. As “the God of truth” (Isa. 65:16), He requires that our actions truthfully reflect our desire and that our true desire be nothing less than conformity – body, soul, and spirit – to the realities of His truth.”

(Gary Henry)

Psalm 51

- V. 7ff - Q7. Count how many different phrases David uses to request God's forgiveness.
 - Eleven
- Vv. 7-9 – David’s Plea
 - “hyssop” - an aromatic plant – used for ceremonial cleansing (Lev. 14:3-7; Num. 19:18)
 - “... whiter than snow”
 - If God cleanses, it will be done completely (Isa. 1:18)
 - V. 8 - Just as the Lord created a deep sadness of repentance, it is He who can keep the sinner from being overwhelmed by His guilt.
 - V. 9 – a plea to completely disregard his sin



Psalm 51

□ Vv. 10-11

- Strongest plea of all; also, asking for God's help in making his heart right again
- Does not want to lose God's favor
 - May have entered his mind what happened to Saul when rejected by God (1 Sam. 16:1-7,14)

□ Vv. 12-13

- Again prays for the joy of a restored relationship
- A vow to use all that has happened to teach others

□ Vv. 14-15

- Overwhelmed by the thought of his guilt, but continues in praise

Psalm 51

- Vv. 16-17 - Q8. What had David come to realize about sacrifices? Be careful to explain the meaning.
 - That they must be offered with the right spirit or heart.
 - Similar to the 'not ... but' language found elsewhere in scripture (e.g. Jn. 6:27) – i.e. a matter of degree
 - More important than the sacrifice is the motivation and attitude behind it

Psalm 51

“One of the hardest truths for us to remember is the importance of true penitence. Even when we’re conscious of a desperate need for God, we often seek His favor by offering Him nothing more than the outward actions of worship. But what God is more interested in is the condition of our hearts, and if our hearts are not truly given to Him in godly sorrow, then there is nothing else we can offer Him that will be acceptable ... David is teaching us in Psalm 51 that the outward aspects of worship are relatively meaningless *by themselves*. If these deeds don’t come from a humble heart that is conscious of its own sin, then God is not pleased by them. This, as we have said, is not an easy truth for us to remember. The temptation is always to give God this or that physical “offering” and suppose that He surely must look upon us favorably for having worshiped Him as we were commanded to do. But such “worship” does not honor God. The thing that He desires us to offer Him, far more than anything else, is “a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart.”
(Gary Henry)

Psalm 51

□ Vv. 18-19

- Realized what his bad example could do to Israel
- Looks at Jerusalem as a spiritual entity, and reduced to ruins by his sinful deeds
- His prayer – for God to build again what sin had torn down
- Then there will be many who also offer this spiritual sacrifice

Psalm 32

- A “maschil” (contemplation) – intended to instruct
 - “The vibrant note of a living faith can scarcely be missed by even a casual reading of the psalm. Weiser does not exaggerate when he says it was written with the very blood of its author. Deep, searching, personal experience lies at the root of this confession. To this day many find it a most illuminating guidance on the way of peace with God.”
(H.E. Leupold)
- Vv. 1-2
 - Theme for the psalm: the blessing of forgiveness
- Vv. 3-4
 - David’s terrible condition when he failed to confess

Psalm 32

- V. 5 – Q1. What must we do if we desire forgiveness?
(reference a verse)
 - Acknowledge it and confess it to God (v. 5).
 - 1 Jn. 1:9 – “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
- Vv. 6ff
 - Proceeds to instruct the godly of a right relationship with God
 - Only because of this that one can find the mercy of God (v. 10)

Psalm 32

To the tune “When My Love to Christ Grows Weak”

Blest are those whom God forgives;

He has covered up their sin;

He does not account their wrongs,

Nor is there deceit within!

I was silent in my sin,

And Your hand was hard on me,

But when I confessed to You,

You forgave iniquity.

Psalm 32

To the tune “When My Love to Christ Grows Weak”

From the flood You save Your own;

Lord, You are my hiding place;

You surround me with the songs

Of salvation by Your grace.

You will guide me with Your eye

Lest unthinking I depart;

For the faithful love He shows,

Shout for joy, you pure in heart!

Psalm 130

- “The unique feature of this psalm is that it centers attention on sin itself, not so much on its results and consequences.” (Leupold)
- Q2. What does the phrase “mark iniquities” mean in v. 3?
 - “Take note of.”
 - If God were to record and deal with all sins as they deserve, man would be without hope. If strict justice were done, the sinner would be beyond hope of redemption.

Psalm 25

- Song from this: “Unto Thee O Lord”
- David’s trust in God, and his penitence
 - “David is pictured in this Psalm as in a faithful miniature. His holy trust, his many conflicts, his great transgressions, his bitter repentance, and his deep distresses are all here; so that we see the very heart of ‘the man after God’s own heart’ ... It is the mark of a true saint that his sorrows remind him of his sins, and his sorrow for sin drives him to his God.” (Charles Spurgeon)



Other Psalms of Penitence

- Psalm 38
 - The heavy toll sin exacts
- Psalm 102
 - A plea for help
 - Sin has caused his terrible condition
- Psalm 6
 - Laments his condition & chastening his sin has brought on
 - Pleads for God's mercy



Lessons for Today

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