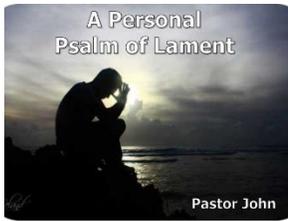


A Personal Psalm of Lament

August 19, 2018

Psalm 51

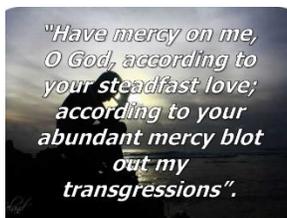
¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴ Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. ⁵ Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. ⁶ You desire truth in the inward being; therefore, teach me wisdom in my secret heart. ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. ⁹ Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain in me a willing spirit. ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. ¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance. ¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶ For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. ¹⁷ The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. ¹⁸ Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, ¹⁹ then you will delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.



We began our series on the Psalms of Lament two weeks ago in the park with a communal Psalm of lament - #44. Last week we looked at an individual Psalm of lament - #22. This week we look at a very personal Psalm of lament - #51. This week we will connect with a Psalm that is a deep and heartfelt confession of sin and the lament in response to the sin. We know the sinner, we know the sin. In this Psalm, we also find connection to ourselves and our sin. Let us pray...

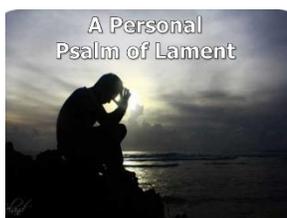
The setting for today's Psalm is David's sin with Bathsheba. Remembering the story from 2nd Samuel 11, David's sin began with his choice not to lead the army out into battle for the annual spring campaign. The sin continued with Bathsheba – this began with a glance that was followed by a second glance. The sin grew by having her brought to the palace, allowing David the opportunity to sleep with her. Her pregnancy compounded the sinning with David trying to get her husband, Uriah, to sleep with Bathsheba. This was an attempt at covering up the sin. When that failed, David orchestrated the murder of Uriah in battle. After the period of mourning, David and Bathsheba were married, and no one was the wiser. David thought that his sin was as good as gone. But it wasn't. In chapter twelve, God sends the prophet Nathan to tell David a little story about a rich man stealing a poor man's one and only lamb. David is incensed with the abuse of power. As his ire is peaking, Nathan tells David, "*You are the man!*" and David realizes the depth of his sin. From the depths of his sin with Bathsheba, David pens Psalm 51.

Like our Psalm from last week, Psalm 51 is also loaded with familiar phrases. Like Psalms 44 and 22, it is full of emotion and passion. This Psalm is probably our best example of a confession of sin. It comes from a place deep in David's heart. David opens the Psalm by throwing himself on God's mercy. Not once does he blame anyone else for his sin. Not once does he implicate anybody else in his choice to sin. He offers no rationalizations, instead he takes full responsibility. If we think about our lives and our sin, we all come to this place too. We all come to the point of realizing that we have sinned, of realizing that we have broken our relationship with God. We may have sinned in different ways, but we all have been, all are, and all will be David. So, today, I invite you to come to the place of admission and confession with me and with David. Hear this as we read verse one together:



"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions".

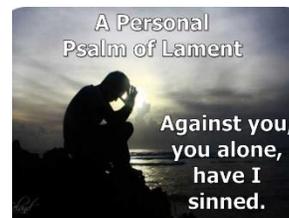
"Have mercy on me"... This song of repentance is a moving appeal to God, seeking God's steadfast mercy and love. David goes on to ask God to cleanse him from the sin that is ever before him. This is an admission that all Christians come to at some point on their spiritual journeys. As one matures in faith, we



come to see things as sin that we were, well, okay with just a little while ago. But as our faith matures, we begin to have better eyes for what sin really is. That playful banter that we

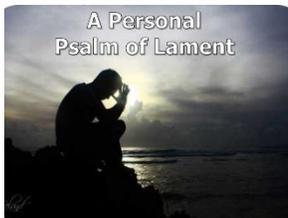
used to engage in. Well, it is harassment. The way we would tease that boy on the playground – well, it is bullying. The artful way in which we did not quite tell all of the truth – yes, deceit and dishonesty. On the journey we all come to these stops – places where we realize that our words or actions do not quite measure up to God’s standards. And after a while, we begin to realize that life is one long battle with sin. Yes, we defeat some sins, but others take their place. We come to understand that we will always battle sin. *"My sin is ever before me"* is how David put it in verse three.

David goes on from this realization to the awareness of who he is sinning against. In verse four, David admits, *"Against you, you alone, have I sinned"*. Yes, David knows that his sin had some horrible impacts on others. And, yes, it will continue to have terrible ramifications. But, but, but. The sin is against God alone. Sin is personal. The sin was between David and God. Period. In the same way, my sin is between me and God alone. Your sin is between you and God alone. This too is our lament.



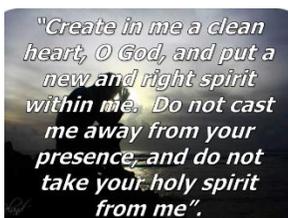
As the Psalm continues to unfold, David accepts responsibility and tells God that He is justified and blameless in passing judgment. Then, in verse five, David sings to God, *"Indeed, I was born guilty"*. From birth, he has been sinful. This is a radical understanding of sin. He feels so guilty and worthy of blame that he extends his life of sin to his very beginning. It is an acknowledgement of how deeply David feels the conviction of his sin. It is also an admission of how strong

the need for God is. If all we have ever known is sin, then how great is our need for a God who can forgive us and help us in our battle with sin. This reality is where we live our day to day lives. Sin is constantly knocking at our door. Satan is constantly working to deceive and entice and entrap us. The lies, the doubt, the fears – they never stop. Our spirit is engaged in a constant battle to remind us that we are loved, that we are worthy, that we are forgiven, that we can indeed stand against sin with God’s help.



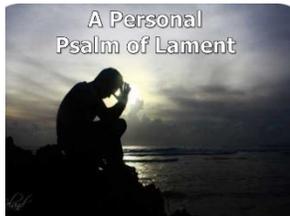
As the Psalm shifts to verse seven, there is a shift in the focus. The first six verses were all about acknowledging the sin and the guilt and the shame. In verse seven, David begins to seek to renew his relationship with God. David begs God, *"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow"*. David is asking God to do some pretty heavy-duty cleaning here. Beat me with hyssop. Beat away my sin, O God. Make me new. David knows that he has sinned against God. He knows the depth to which he sank. But he also knows the depth of God’s love. David knows the greatness of his God’s love. It is that love that will cleanse him, that will make him whiter than snow, that will renew and restore the relationship.

In verses ten and eleven we hear these familiar words:



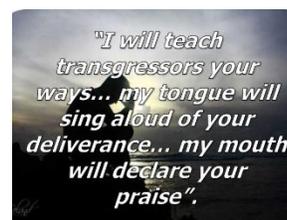
"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me".

These are familiar words, aren't they? We say these words on Ash Wednesday. We say these words as we apply ashes to the forehead, acknowledging that we are sinners in need of God's mercy and grace. We say these words, begging God to remain present to us, sinful as we are. We also say these words as an admission of our need for God. We cannot earn forgiveness. We cannot buy forgiveness. We can only receive God's grace and mercy and forgiveness. As we receive, God places a new and right spirit within us, once again replacing our old sinful self. God puts us back into a right relationship with Him.



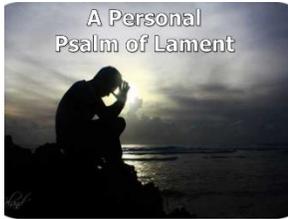
As the Psalm continues to unfold, David continues with this theme of needing God in our lives. He acknowledges one and only one source of rescue from sin and its many implications - the God of mercy and unfailing love. Beginning in verse 13, we hear how the forgiveness that he receives from God changes his life. We hear the impact of being forgiven. My questions for us are: Do we feel this way when we are forgiven? Is this how we respond to God's love?

In verse 14-16, these are David's responses: *"I will teach transgressors your ways... my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance... my mouth will declare your praise"*. Is this our



response to God's mercy and grace and forgiveness and love in our lives? Do we overflow with praise and singing and declarations of God's goodness and love? The Psalm goes on to tell us how we can be a sacrifice to God. David tells us that the sacrifice acceptable to God is a *"broken spirit, a broken and contrite*

heart". When we are broken, we readily see our need for God. We see that God alone can save us. God seeks followers who have a contrite heart. That means we have repented of our sins. We have declared that we will turn from our sins and will strive to walk holy and upright lives.



This is our battle. We struggle between living holy lives and living in sin. In Psalm 51, David exposes the central human predicament - the contrast between human sinfulness from birth and the desire of God for inner and outer integrity in our lives. It assumes that our outward struggles are symptomatic of our inner life. The Psalm connects our very human acts of outward sin to the sinfulness that lives with our heart and spirit. But all is not lost. The Psalm also recognizes God's ability and willingness not only to forgive the acts of sin and grant acceptance and everlasting life to us, the sinner, but it also reiterates God's ability and willingness to rectify the sinner's inner being, creating and renewing the very core of the person — their heart and spirit. God is willing and able to create a clean heart and an upright spirit within each one of us.

In order for us to have a clean heart and a right spirit, we have to be honest with God. We can be like the David that we remember from 2nd Samuel 11 – doing everything in his power to cover up his sin. One lie led to another and to another and to another. When we are honest, we must admit that at points in our lives, we have all been there too. And we can get stuck there. To help us connect with this place where we can get stuck, a quick story:

Once upon a time there was a boy who was shooting rocks with a slingshot. He could never hit his target. He was in his Grandma's backyard one day and he spied her pet duck. On impulse he took aim and let fly. The stone hit, and the duck was dead. The boy panicked and hid the bird in the woodpile, only to look up and see his sister watching. After lunch that day, Grandma told Sally to help with the dishes. Sally responded, "Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today. Didn't you Johnny?" And on the way by, she whispered to him, "Remember the duck!"

So, Johnny did the dishes. What choice did he have? For the next several weeks he was at the sink often. Sometimes for his duty, sometimes for his sin. "Remember the duck," Sally would whisper when he began to object. Finally, one day he became so weary of the chore, he decided that any punishment would be better than washing more dishes. He confessed to killing the pet duck. "I know, Johnny," his Grandma said, giving him a hug. "I was standing at the kitchen window and saw the whole thing. Because I love you, I forgave you. I wondered how long you would let Sally make a slave out of you."

How often do we go down a road similar to Johnny's road – living with the guilt and shame of our sin, being enslaved by Satan's lies? You and I - we can all walk that road until it gets to a point. Then we must confess our sins and we just pour them out before God. I imagine God says the same thing that Johnny's Grandma said: I forgave you long ago. What took you so long to come home?

Friends, if we truly desire to have a clean heart and to walk with an upright spirit, we must repent of our sin right away. We must confess whenever and wherever we feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit. There is no need to carry the burden. There is no reason to pretend that we can hide our sin from God, the one whom we alone sin against.

May we, like the broken and contrite David, confess our sins, accept God's grace and forgiveness, and allow His love to wash away our sins, making us whiter than snow. Then we will once again live as forgiven children of our loving God. And like David, may we joyously answer our call to share this good news with the world, so that they too may be loved and forgiven. May it be so for each of us this week. Let us pray...

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) How has your understanding of sin grown as your faith matured? How can you share these insights with younger Christians?
- 2) What current sin have you discovered or realized recently in your life?
Come to God and confess, allowing God to hear your prayer of repentance.
- 3) Serving others sometimes involves allowing ourselves to be vulnerable.
What sins have you overcome could be testimonies that free others?