

## PSALM 51

*A Contrite Sinner's Prayer for Pardon.*

### INTRODUCTION.

- A. Scripture text: **Psalm 51:1-19**. Preached at Morningside Chapel church of Christ.
- B. This is the zenith of the penitential psalms (Psa. 6,32,38,102,130,143). There may be no more impassioned or beautiful prayer for forgiveness and renewal in the Bible than here.
- C. An opening cry for mercy (51:1,2) is followed by the poet's expression of the enormity of his sin (51:3-5).
- D. The plea continues in 51:6-12, with increasing emphasis on the inner change the author knows he needs. In 51:13-17 the writer, anticipating deliverance, vows to praise God and tell others of his grace.
- E. In 51:18,19; David asks God's blessing on the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, so he can be praised appropriately by offering animal sacrifices.

### I. PSALM 51:1-5.

- A. The text:

Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Thy compassion 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 Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, And done what is evil in Thy sight, So that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, And blameless when Thou dost judge. [5] Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.
- B. David's Confession of Sin.

[v1] Dominated by the sense of his wrong doing, David comes to God as a beggar, asking that to which he can claim no intrinsic right. He rests his case squarely on God's nature.

[v2] Iniquity can convey the basic ideas of crookedness (see Jer. 11:10), guilt (see Ex. 34:7), or punishment (Gen. 4:13). Sin indicates missing the mark.

[v4] Sin is sin because God is God, and all wrongdoing is most importantly against Him. The poet is not denying that other people have been hurt by his misdeeds, but is poetically expressing the matter in its ultimate dimensions.

[v5] With bold poetic exaggeration, David describes the depth of his corruption by speaking as if the fatal flaw had been his from conception. He is not trying to excuse himself by advancing some concept of universal, hereditary depravity. Rather he is engaging in further self-abnegation (giving up of rights, denunciation). He takes full responsibility. It is inadmissible to base some doctrine of the nature of man on the touching bit of poetry.
- C. David's comments in verse 51:5 must be balanced with Ezek. 18 (esp. v10). Instead of the text teaching inherited sin it would be better understood as saying that David was born into a sinful world. One author said, "If I was born in a cabbage patch that would not make me a cabbage." David is making that comment that he has grown up in the world and that world has been sinful all his days.

### II. PSALM 51:6-12.

- A. The text:

Behold, Thou dost desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part Thou wilt make me know wisdom. [7] Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. [8] Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which Thou hast broken rejoice. [9] Hide Thy 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. [11] Do not cast me away from Thy presence, And do not take Thy Holy Spirit from me. [12] Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation, And sustain me with a willing spirit.
- B. David's Plea for Purging.

[v7] The Hebrew verb rendered purge is from the same root as that rendered "sin" in 51:2,3, but this form means to "de-sin."

[v10] Verses 51:10-12 stress inward change (note the spirit in each verse). The approach requests a new outlook and power so the author will no longer vacillate, but be steadfast. This idea, though found in the prophets (see Jer. 32:39; Ezek. 36:26), is rare in the psalms.

[v12] Salvation would include a new outlook. A willing spirit is probably a free and generous disposition to serve Yahweh, which he feels he cannot create by his own efforts.

### III. PSALM 51:13-17.

#### A. The text:

*Then I will teach transgressors Thy ways, And sinners will be converted to Thee. [14] Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation; Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Thy righteousness. [15] O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Thy praise. [16] For Thou dost not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; Thou art not pleased with burnt offering. [17] The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.*

#### B. Promises and Petitions.

[v13] With this vow the psalm takes a new turn. Verses 51:13-17 alternate vow and continued petition. Such great deliverance would demand proclamation, rooted in the author's personal experience of God.

[v16] No atoning sacrifices were indicated in the OT for sins like adultery and murder. Presumably God would accept the sacrifice offered by the person described in 51:17.

[v17] The man whose bones were broken sees a broken spirit as the sacrifice that is acceptable.

### IV. PSALM 51:18,19.

#### A. The text:

*By Thy favor do good to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem. [19] Then Thou wilt delight in righteous sacrifices, In burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then young bulls will be offered on Thine altar.*

#### B. Regarding Zion.

[v19] It would seem that God cannot be praised aright until the city is rebuilt, just as in 51:1-17 He cannot be praised aright until a life is rebuilt.

### CONCLUSION AND INVITATION.

#### A. David's sin is forgiven him (2Sam. 12:13).

*Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.*

#### B. Psalm 51:

1. Shows the depth of agony and despair one can feel when they know they have sinned.
2. Does not teach total hereditary depravity.
3. Teaches that God will forgive the penitent.