

Sermon: The Mercy of the Lord

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Sermon Text: Psalm 51

Picture a snow-covered mountain. It is huge and completely covered in white. I want to remind you today through Psalm 51 that the Lord covers the mountain of our sin and says, “Forgiven, white as snow.” All humanity needs to hear this tremendous message. Perhaps you need to hear it today for a very particular reason. Please turn in your Bibles to Psalm 51. There are three things I want to share with you from this psalm, and they can be summarized in three words:

- 1) **MERCY**
- 2) **RENEWAL**
- 3) **FRUIT**

(1.) **MERCY – The Great Plea for Mercy (verses 1-4)**

^{PS 51:1} Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions
² Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are proved right when you speak
and justified when you judge.

Why does Psalm 51 verses 1-2 begin with such a deep, heart cry for **mercy, covering, washing away** and **cleansing**? Answer: because David, the writer, has committed **seven** identifiable sins, and he is completely overwhelmed by them. The title affixed under Psalm 51 tells us to go and read the story of David’s seven-fold sin. That story, you may well recall, is in 2 Sa-

muel chapters 11 and 12. Turn to 2 Samuel chapter 11. Here we find the tragic record of David's sins. If you look at this chapter carefully, you will see all seven. We will discuss them in a moment, but first consider chapter 12 with me. It is the record of what happened about one year later. Nathan the prophet came to visit David and to tell him a story. What a moving story he told! Truly, the Lord gave Nathan tremendous wisdom.

Here is the story. There were two men – a very poor, humble man and a very wealthy man. The poor man owned one very precious, small female lamb. All his hope for the future of his impoverished family was in that little lamb. The wealthy man had a visitor come to see him. When visitors come, we like to feed them and give them something to drink. Well, this is what the wealthy man told his servants to do – to prepare a meal for the guest. But he told the servants not to use any of his own sheep. Rather they were to go and take the little lamb that belonged to the poor man across the hills. The rich man actually stole the poor man's one lamb, the hope of his family. When King David heard this story, he was furious with this wealthy man! He wanted him identified and punished. Then came the silencing words from Nathan, "David, *you* are that man!" The story was a parable of David's sin with Bathsheba. Nathan's story cut to David's heart, and David had nowhere to run. All he could say was, "I have sinned against the Lord." No excuses, no attempt to run. No. David saw his sins.

The seven identifiable sins of David were:

- 1) **Lust** – lusting after a woman – Bathsheba
- 2) **Adultery** – breaking his marriage vow
- 3) **Covetousness** – jealousy and wanting what belonged to another
- 4) **Stealing** – this starts with covetousness, which if it is not checked, leads to stealing.
- 5) **Lying** – dishonest speech to the husband, Uriah, laying a trap
- 6) **Murder** – to cover over the adultery and pregnancy, he arranged the murder of the husband, Uriah.
- 7) **Leadership failure and scandal** – David had broken covenant with his people and was not a righteous example before them. Leaders, whoever and wherever they are, are examples to those they lead. David failed.

You will notice that Nathan's role here was to awaken the conscience of David. A pastor has called Nathan the "instrument" which God used to awaken David to his sin. God uses different instruments to awaken our consciences – a story, a sermon, a death or sickness, a godly testimony, life's problems.

Now, this is exactly where Psalm 51: 1-2 begins. David is now awake to his seven sins and he needs mercy!

Step #1 to finding mercy is **being personal about your sin**. Do you remember in English what a personal pronoun is? "Me", "my", "our". These are all personal pronouns. Martin Luther, that thundering Reformer of the sixteenth century, over and over said it is the personal pronouns that make

the book of Psalms. Well, notice, friends, what David says, “Have mercy on **me . . . my** transgressions . . . cleanse **me**.” Do you need God’s mercy for sin in your life? Then here is the first step you must take. “Lord, I personally am the sinner. I have no excuses.”

Step #2 – see how deep your sin really is. The Bible uses many different words to describe our sin. Look at the different words used just in the first few verses of Psalm 51.

Transgressions – I am living rebelliously towards God.

Iniquities – I have some twisted thinking in my life, and I need to get back on the right path.

Sins – I have been missing the mark and aim of living for God’s honour and glory.

Evil – Yes, there have been matters of deliberate wickedness that I must walk away from.

“God, there is no cover-up, no denial, no blame-shifting! I am just like the prodigal or lost son, and, Lord, I am coming to You now, knowing and acknowledging something of the weight and depth of my sin. I have broken Your law, denied Your will.”

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” (Luke 15:21)

Let’s review steps one and two –

- 1) **I am the problem.**
- 2) **My sins are deep.**

And now step three - Mercy is what I need.

Step #3 is pleading for the divine touch of MERCY. Friends, I want to remind you today that our God is never frugal, stingy or miserly with His mercy – He is absolutely generous. The Lord will overwhelm you with His mercy! David speaks of God’s mercy, unfailing love and great compassion. That is what sinners need! No, we do not deserve His love, but He will give it to all who ask. He will forgive and cleanse our sins away. The stains on my clothing are so many, but He can wash them all away (verse 2).

“Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red as crimson,
they shall be like wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

Here, friends, in verses 1-2, is the story of David’s great plea for mercy.

- He confesses personally his seven sins.
- He now begins to see the depth of these sins.
- He now sees God’s mercy as the only solution!

Do you say “amen” in your heart to God’s mercy as the only solution to the sin in your life?

“In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”
(Hebrews 9:22)

“. . . and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7)

Praise God for His mercy in the blood of Jesus, which covers me like the snow-covered mountains. I am covered!

(2.) RENEWAL – The Great Plea for Spiritual Renewal (verses 7-12)

^{PS 51:7} Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Sin takes its toll on a person. It hardens the soul; it can bring bitterness and a sour spirit. It can leave a taste like a sour lemon upon one’s life. However, when one receives an experience of God’s mercy, the beginning of a wonderful process of spiritual renewal starts in one’s life. Verses 7-12 of Psalm 51 now take us from the experience of God’s mercy to the blessings of spiritual renewal. I see five elements in David’s plea for spiritual renewal.

First, there is a plea for deeper cleansing – whiter and whiter (vs. 7). The hyssop plant is a herb which was often used symbolically in sprinkling to show cleansing. It is like David is going deeper and deeper in this wonderful blessing of God’s forgiveness. David needs much soul healing after the seven heinous sins, and in verse 7 a genuine, deep cleansing is taking place. David comes to see that he is clean, he is renewed, he has passed under the awesome cloud of God’s mercy, and it is good!

Second, there is David's **plea for restoration of his former joy in the Lord** (verses 8 and 12a) – "Restore to me the joy of your salvation . . ." Sin takes joy out of your heart – it really does. The fruit of the Holy Spirit, which includes joy, cannot be exhibited if one is walking in rebellion to God. But David has now been forgiven, and he desires to walk in joy again. Thus he pleads for joy to return. And, my brothers and sisters, it does and it will!

Third, there is David's **plea for a greater work of full "re-creation"**, verse 10: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." David wants that new purity of heart. He thirsts for a lifestyle of purity and holiness. "Blessed are the pure in heart" (Matt. 5:8). It is a plea for new direction, new desires, noble pursuits.

Fourth, David **pleads for a sealing of the Holy Spirit upon his life** in verse 11. He feels that the Spirit has withdrawn or has receded from him, and he now knows his weakness. Without the Spirit, David knows that he is powerless to overcome temptation.

Fifth, and finally, David **pleads for a new, willing desire to please God**. In verse 12b, it reads, ". . . and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me". Apart from the mercy of God, our wills are resistant to the leading of the Lord and to His divine will. Thus, David pleads for this mercy so that his will would truly be obedient and please God.

This section of Psalm 51, verses 7-12, is clearly about David's pleas for a deep spiritual renewal. I would say to you that David is spiritually a far deeper man now than he ever was in the past. It was a very painful road that took him to this place, yet true.



Psalm 51 is the story of a *believer* who has fallen into sin – do not forget this! There are different ways of describing this fall. Sometimes we refer to it as a believer who has backslidden. Sometimes we refer to it as a believer needing to be reinvigorated. Sometimes we refer to it as a believer in need of covenant renewal. Psalm 51 is a glorious word of hope that the believer can be forgiven and pardoned and be blessed by spiritual renewal and new growth.

There will be believers hearing this sermon today who are in need of such pardon and renewal. The sins of the believer may have been adultery,

fraudulent money activities, isolation from the Lord's people, etc. You know what the "it" is in your life. Psalm 51 is a word for you today. You need to plead with the Lord for repentance, pardon and spiritual renewal. Do not be afraid to speak of your need for spiritual renewal.

(3.) FRUIT – The Fruit to Those Who Experience Mercy and Renewal (verses 13-17)

PS 51:13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will turn back to you.
14 Save me from bloodguilt, O God,
the God who saves me,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.
15 O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise.

Fruit in a believer's life is critical. You should know God's children through their fruit. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is one fruit and can be summed up in the word "love", yet this love is expressed in so many different ways in the believer's life – generosity, service, kindness, faithfulness, joy etc. What specific expressions of this fruit of the Spirit can you find in verses 13-17 of Psalm 51?

David takes up a **new ministry** now that he has experienced God's mercy. **He wants to teach other sinners the way back to the Lord.** Personal experience is a great teacher. David then becomes an evangelist to sinners. I love the old definition of evangelism: "Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to go for bread." Brothers and sisters, we are saved to serve! When we are forgiven, we want others to know forgiveness from the Lord. This is love.

"... And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."
(Luke 22:32)

Another specific expression of this fruit is a renewal of worship and praise. In verse 14, David says, "Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, *and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.*" David enters

into a new stage as the sweet singer of Israel – increasingly there is liberty, freedom and song! His heart is full of thanksgiving for the love of God. Anyone I know who has experienced mercy in the Lord has a new melody and freedom in his heart.

“This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long . . .”

In verses 16-17, there is the desire for **re-consecration**. David is not simply a ritualist. He desires humility. He wants to worship in love as an overflow of a broken heart. He wants also to live each day in true sacrifice.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.” (Romans 12:1)

Briefly now, the remaining verses following after verse 17 change the theme to David’s desire to lead his people once again. We will not develop these verses (18-19) but only list the desires we see here: David wants the people to prosper; he wants the people protected; and he wants a revival of true spirit-filled worship to accompany the rituals of their worship.

Let us return now to where we began this message. The Christian is like a snow-covered mountain, covered with the mercy of the Lord by the blood of Jesus Christ. I hope you know that forgiveness and mercy. David came to know it in a fresh way following his fall into his web of sins. Is there someone here who has *never* known such mercy and pardon? Do not delay. Confess your sins to God. Cry out for mercy. Is there someone here whose love has grown cold to the mercy of God in Christ? Do not delay. Confess your sins to God. Cry out for mercy.

Mercy and renewal will lead to new desires – to speak of the gospel, to praise the Lord, to be consecrated in daily living in thankfulness to the Lord. The people of the Lord will be known by their fruit.

“True Christianity is a divine and spiritual thing. The whole work from beginning to end is a wonderful work of the Holy Spirit in the soul.”

Andrew Murray