



Sing unto
the Lord a
new song

A STUDY ON SOME OF THE PSALMS

WEEK TWO – PSALM 51 – “A Prayer of Repentance”

This Psalm is described as a penitential prayer and probably the Bible's best example of repentant prayer.

Before we look further into this Psalm, it is important to know the background to this plea for forgiveness.

Read 2 Samuel 11 and 12 before our study night.

Some thirteen years after becoming King, David was taking a break from the fighting the Ammonites and remained at home in Jerusalem whilst his army was engaged in battle. It struck me very strongly when reading this, that had David been where he should have been, leading his army, this encounter would not have occurred.

- Do we think about where we are and what we do, in our relationship with God?
- When doing the study on the first book of Peter, we looked at verse 8 of chapter five which says: *“Be sober-minded and alert. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”* We need to think about what we do and where we go in relation to our spiritual life. Had David been at the head of the battle, where he should have been, this event would not have happened.
- Remember the occasion when the devil tempted Jesus? His response was to tell Satan to get behind him. It is good to remind ourselves of this.

What is so sad about the development of this saga is that David compounded each wrong decision with an even worse one. In fact, his actions led to him having murder committed on his behalf by having Uriah, (husband of Bathsheba), placed in the front line of the battle where the danger was most severe.

- We, hopefully, may not be contemplating murder, but we should always consider our actions and their ramifications. I have mentioned before that line of a gospel song: *“So many lives depend on what I do...”*. How do we keep ourselves walking in God's ways and not our own? All our actions have an affect on ourselves and other people.

Turning to Psalm 51: Read verses 1-6

God did not allow David to think he had 'got away with it'. He sent the prophet, Nathan, to confront him regarding his sins, and their consequences. Psalm 99, speaking in relation to Moses, Aaron and Samuel who called upon God's name, says: *"They kept his testimonies and the statutes He gave them. You answered them, O Lord our God; You were to them **God-Who-Forgives, though you took vengeance on their deeds.**"* In other words, there was a price to pay. Remember, however, this is under the Old Covenant.

It is clear from these verses, that David was desperate to restore a right relationship with God but also, that he understood the pathway to receiving God's forgiveness.

- What steps did David take according to verses 1-2?
- In his confession and repentance, verses 3-6, what three things did David do?
- How can we learn from this for our own lives?

Read verses 7-12

Note that *to purge* meant to purify by removing a stain. Hyssop was a plant that the priests used in ceremonial cleansings. They dipped a bunch of hyssops in the blood of a sacrificial animal and then sprinkled the blood on the person who required cleansing. Here, David is asking God to metaphorically do what the priests of old had physically done.

- Do we regularly ask God to forgive us our sins? Although we do not use the rituals of the Old Testament, do we reflect on our behaviour and understand the necessity of asking for cleansing?
- Think about Jesus on the cross. Why did he cry out that God had forsaken him?
- What, in verse 8, did David want God to restore to him?
- Verses 10-12 are powerful. For me, I feel the enormous sense of longing in David, to be in a right relationship with God once again. There is a sense, almost, of desperation and a realisation of what he may have lost.
- Do we ever cry out in this way, for our relationship to be restored?
- Remember, that to God, sin is sin – he does not rate any one sin greater than another. It is often hard to grasp that.
- Let us pray that we too, would be upheld by God's generous spirit. He is to us the God who forgives.

Read verses 13-17

In this section of the Psalm, David is demonstrating that we do not stop at having been forgiven. He commits to three things. Firstly, he says he desires to teach other transgressors, or sinners, about God's ways. He then commits himself to offering praise and worship to God. Thirdly he stresses the importance of a broken and contrite heart, (contrite meaning feeling or expressing [remorse](#) at the recognition that one has done wrong heart before God).

It is so important that we do not just say thank you to God and then sit back. We need to share our experiences so that others might receive God's love, blessing and care. We can easily do that during a conversation. People need to see, as we do with David in this Psalm, that we are genuine. It is often more about what we do than what we say. People are not fooled by superficial ideas and practices.

- How might we “teach transgressors about God’s ways”?
- Other than in church services, do we offer praise and worship to God? How might we do this?
- We must be genuine in our repentance before God. People soon suss out whether we are ‘real’. Again, this comes back to ‘doing’ as much as ‘saying’. Think about the parable of the Good Samaritan. He practically demonstrated his concern.

Read verses 18-19

As well as praying for God's favour in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, he then talks about the sacrifice of righteousness. In Psalm 40:6, David says *“You take no delight in sacrifices or offerings. Now that you have made me listen, I finally understand – you do not require burnt offerings or sin offerings.”*

It may have been a difficult journey for David, but he has finally ‘got it’! It is not the outward show that matters, it is our very selves, the inward part that understands God is holy and he is righteous.



PRAYER

Father God, thank you that we can always come to you in genuine repentance, knowing that you will create a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us, and empower us to let others know this too.

Amen