

Psalm 51

All the Psalms deal with a question. There is a question at the heart of every Psalm that universal to the human experience, something that we must all deal with, a question we all need to ask not just once in our life but many times over the course of our days.

And the question at the heart of Psalm 51 is no exception. It is a question we must all face yet very few have the courage to really ask.

“What do I do with my sin?”

(insert story)

Every religion, every philosophy, political systems and ideology is ultimately about one thing—managing our sin, finding a way to live with our faults, failures, and shortcomings—mitigating our evil so that it does the least damage.

Jesus says give me your sin, allow me to make you new and give you a greater purpose than you can imagine.

Psalm 51 is one of handful of Psalms that reveal the exact circumstances around its writing.

This David’s public confession.

David wrote this Psalm after he took a woman named Bathsheba to be his wife and they had a child. And if you don’t know the story, you may say, “What’s wrong with that?” Well, Bathsheba was already married to another man. And one day when David, the King of Israel, should have been out fighting with his men, he was wandering on the roof of the royal palace in Jerusalem. He saw Bathsheba bathing and he had her brought to the palace. And David the king--anointed by God, pulled by the Lord out of the field as a little boy shepherding his father’s sheep, to lead God’s chosen people—took Bathsheba, the wife of another man, into his bedroom.

A few weeks later Bathsheba sent word she had conceived his child. David attempted to deceive her husband, who had been away battling another nation, into believing the child was his. And when her husband had too much integrity to be tricked, David conspired to have him killed in battle. After Bathsheba mourned, David made her his eighth wife.

So...if you are keeping score at home, David directly broke at least five of the Ten Commandments and you could make a case for a couple more for good measure.

And life went on with David living in sinfully in plain sight—until a prophet came into David’s royal throne room and told him he had sinned.

Not long after that David wrote this public Psalm.

From an early age we learn to lie, deceive and hide the truth in order the maintain the image we want to maintain. The problem with hiding our sin, is we never deal with our sin. It’s a lot like knowing we have cancer and then choosing to do nothing about it and let it continue to grow in our body.

That's not what David did.

Why?

David knew what to do with his sin. David allowed the Lord to crucify his sin, resurrect him and then renew him to serve the Lord.

First David asked the Lord to crucify his sin:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Psalm 51:1-5

David's sin was so bad that even by today's relaxed moral standards for leaders, David would have been removed from office, arrested and jailed. He would have been cancelled and never heard from again.

Yet God did not do that.

And you might say, "Well, of course God didn't do that. He's God. He forgives people. That's what God does."

True. But the Lord removed the King right before David because of his sin.

That king was a man named Saul—a tall good-looking guy with great hair, we are told. But the Lord rejected Saul as king because he Saul broke God's law. The Word says that the Lord regretted make Saul king. And you may be asking "What must Stalin-esque crime against humanity must Saul have done for God to remove him from being king when he didn't remove David?"

Well...Saul, defeated a wicked nation in battle. And the Lord commanded Saul to destroy the entire nation—all the people, all the livestock, everything so that they would be wiped from the earth.

Saul didn't do it. Saul killed everyone all the men, women and children. But he kept their king alive and he also kept for himself the very best of the livestock—oxen, sheep, fat calves and lambs. So Saul wiped out everything that he saw no value in. After that Saul built a monument to himself on the top of a mountain.

You could argue that Saul's sin was not even in the same ballpark as the five or six commandments David broke in one fell swoop.

But, if we did, we'd be asking the wrong question. Sin is sin. All sin is bad, all sin is breaking the eternal law of God in rebellion against His Lordship and Kingship.

But our sin—whatever it may be—is not the most important question.

Our confession and our repentance—as a response to God's astonishing willingness to forgive is the most important question.

Saul's confession of sin was half-hearted at best and his repentance was non-existent.

David's confession and repentance was total, unreserved and comprehensive.

Saul held back some of his pride, some of his will, some of his self-righteousness.

David held nothing back.

Has anyone ever apologized to you and rather than throwing themselves on your mercy instead inserted that little 3 letter word? "But." And then they went on to explain the circumstances that led them to do what they did, seeking justification rather than absolution, seeking to explain rather accept forgiveness.

David didn't do that.

David asked God for mercy not because he deserved mercy but because he knew God loves Him. David had no reliance on his own righteousness. David asked God because of His great and amazing grace to wipe away His sin. David confessed he could not escape even the sight of his sin. He could not even look in the mirror without seeing his sin. David's said His sin was defining him. And David said that God's judgment against him, whatever it may be, was justified.

He went on to say that his sin was inescapable because he was born a sinner, that he was even conceived a sinner, sin was in his very DNA—an inherited condition passed down from mother and father to child, all the way to Adam and Eve. Theologians call this "original sin." Original sin is not a way of blaming my Mom, my Dad, my grandma, grandpa, Noah, Adam, Eve or anyone else for my sin. Original sin does not absolve me of blame for my rebellion against God. Original sin does not make me a victim of genealogy or let me off the hook for the sin I commit today. Instead, original sin says that our sin is inescapable. It's in our DNA in the same way that my eye color, height, dimples or having webbed toes is inescapable. We cannot stop sinning because we are sinners. We are powerless to overcome it.

A man named Paul described the condition like this:

I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

Romans 7:14-17

Most Christians don't understand this. We think we can manage and control our sin but Psalm 51 demonstrates that our sin controls us.

Until we get to that place where we understand we bring nothing to our own redemption and we are absolutely dependent upon God's grace for any and all of it—we won't know salvation. So long as we stand with even our pinky toe upon the foundation of our own righteousness, we miss the fullness of life Jesus intends.

Most cannot face this truth because the weight of our sin is too much to bear, the prospect of dying to self-sufficiency, autonomy, our own capability is an absolute terror.

And one only one thing makes it tenable.

There was a woman in a church I used to serve. She was dying. During her last few days on this earth, I visited her in hospice care. And I expected, walking into a room where someone was going to die, that I was going to encounter a gloomy scene.

But it was the opposite. She was absolutely ebullient. It was like this 65-year-old woman was waiting for Christmas morning to come so she could unwrap her presents. She said:

"I can't wait to die."

And I asked, "Because you're in that much pain?"

But that's not what she meant. She said:

"I'm excited because until I die, I can't wait to be resurrected. I want to know what new life really feels like."

Jesus Himself put it like this:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

John 12:24-25

A lot of never know new life because we cling to the last desperate, dying threads of an old broken existence. We live in the husk of an old, dying life rather than allowing new life to take root. This is why many people never grow in Christ and why many churches die. They live on in their old failing and fading strength rather than dying to self and letting Jesus resurrect them.

But not David. David knew he was dead in sin and he asked the Lord to resurrect him.

Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Psalm 56:6-12

David asked the Lord for a resurrected life. David not only asked Him to forgive him of his sin, to cleanse him from it but to cause him to live differently, to walk in newness of life.

David asked the Lord to restore his integrity, to make his inner being one of truth. He asked for wisdom. He asked for healing and to be made clean. He asked for joy—just one of many times in the Psalms where David models asking for joy. So we should absolutely not underestimate the importance of seeking joy. David wants a clean heart, meaning a heart that is devoted to God above all else. David want a spirit that finds its security in the Lord. David also asks for intimacy with the Lord. He wants to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

That's what the resurrected life looks like. The end of God's work in our life is not to merely forgive our sin. That's just the beginning. We're just getting started when our sin is paid, washed away, wiped from the heavenly ledger.

And Jesus' resurrection was proof of that. For 2000 years God's people sacrificed goats, bulls, sheep, turtledoves to pay for their sin. But none of those animals ever came back to life and God's people were stuck living the same old life; sinning and paying for that sin, over and over again. But Jesus' not only paid for our sin through dying, He was resurrected to give us new life.

And if we are not living a new life in the power of His resurrection, we are missing out because God desires to do so much more in you that just forgive your sin.

Much more.

Jesus has a ministry for you.

That new life, the resurrection life, we've been given—filled with joy, integrity, healing, newness of life and intimacy with God—is not a life unto ourselves. It a life with a purpose.

After resurrection, David prays to serve the Lord. David prays for a ministry.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Psalm 51:13-17

So after David asked for the Lord to crucify his sin and resurrect him, David asked to serve the Lord. David asked to be made useful again for the Kingdom of God, to disciple other sinners, to be God's vessel to convict them of their sin and cause them to repent. He asked to proclaim God' glory, to praise Him publicly and powerfully, to be a vessel for the power of God to be poured out.

David didn't just ask to be forgiven and made new. David asked to be useful to the Lord. He asked for a ministry.

I have chosen this word ministry intentionally because it is not something most of us think about for ourselves. The average Christian thinks the pastor has a ministry or the church staff or a missionary. But we are not the only ones. The word we translate as ministry simply means to serve, service to do be useful for something beyond us. And Jesus' intent is that everyone who he redeems from sin, resurrects and renews has a ministry. Theologian John Stott agreed:

Jesus calls all his disciples to "ministry," that is to service. He himself is the servant par excellence, and He calls us to be servants too. This much is certain; if we are Christians we must spend our lives in service to God and man.

And then Stott goes on to say that Jesus calls some to missionaries, evangelists and pastors. But others He calls to be doctors, accountants, teachers, farmers, bankers, auto mechanics, home makers and in every job we work for Jesus. We serve Him and others. It's all ministry and that ministry continues not only throughout this life but through all eternity. Ministry is our eternal calling.

And this is the amazing thing Psalm 51 tells us Jesus does.

He takes us from being broken and a slave to sin and He makes us a servant to the King. He takes us from a life where we are lost and don't know what to do with our sin and faults and failures and He gives us a life of the highest and greatest purpose. Jesus takes from death to life.

And our part begins with repentance. It begins with understanding that we cannot save ourselves and we need to crucify the old self and allow Jesus to resurrect us.