

The Gift of Confession
Psalm 51

Take your Bibles and turn to 2 Samuel 11.

Let me start by asking you a question tonight. Do you want to change? We just looked at a passage on Sunday where Jesus basically asked that same question in John 5. What did He ask the man who had been an invalid for 38 years? He asked him, “Do you want to be healed?” Jesus wasn’t just asking the obvious. He was asking the soul-searching question that He asks all of us. He wasn’t just asking if that man wanted to be healed of his infirmity, He was asking him if he wanted to change.

Jesus Christ intends to change you. Salvation means so much more than just being delivered from hell. It means being transformed into a new creation. It means being made new. It means being made well. Jesus has the power to make you well. We’ve been observing His power the last couple Sundays as we look at the power of His miracles. His miracles show us that He is able to do what He says He can do. He is able to do what He says He came to do.

“I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.” (John 12:46)

He is able to take you out of the darkness. He is able to make you a child of the light. This means He is able to take away your spiritual blindness so that you can see what Francis Schaeffer called “true truth”—objective truth about God without which we cannot understand anything accurately. He gives you the ability to see God. Just as He said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9) When we see God revealed in Christ Jesus we are changed.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. (2 Corinthians 3:18a)

You can be changed! He has accomplished the work that will make you well. But again, do you want to change? Do you want to be healed? There is only one thing that can stand in the way.

Turn to 2 Samuel 11 with me. At the end of 2 Samuel 10, David had reached the peak. He was on the mountaintop, at the summit of success. God had given him the promise that his house and his kingdom would be made sure forever before Him. David was promised that his offspring, His son, would build a house for God’s name, and that God would establish the throne of his kingdom forever. Then, immediately after hearing that covenant, we read of David’s military successes. God gave him unparalleled success in battle. He defeated the Philistines, the Moabites, Hadadezer king of Zobah, together with his allies the Syrians, and the Ammonites. Things could not get better for David, and they didn’t. They got worse...a lot worse.

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David

remained at Jerusalem. (Just to note the obvious here, David has grown slack in his leadership. True leadership means service, just as Jesus modeled and taught, but David has grown comfortable with being served, rather than serving. Watch what it leads to.)

² It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. ³ And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" ⁴ So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. ⁵ And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant." (2 Samuel 11:1-5)

This passage is a warning to us. First of all, we are warned of our greatest vulnerability. We are weakest when we are strongest. To quote Pastor Kevin, "The greatest danger we can face in life is success." The inverse is also true, as Paul said, "When I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:10b) David fell when he was enjoying success. This is the timeless warning of God's Word. Solomon puts it succinctly for us in Proverbs,

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. (Proverbs 16:18)

Or, as Paul put it to the Corinthians,

¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Corinthians 10:12)

It's when we think we are standing firm that we are most likely to fall. David had become distracted from the one thing that had driven him all those years in the wilderness. He had become complacent with the life of power and luxury. He was lulled into sin by the old siren song of money, sex, power, and fame. Hear this warning tonight. The greatest danger confronting you tonight is not inflation, it's not a politician, it's not a foreign militia. Your greatest problem is not your spouse or your children. The greatest danger you face is yourself. Your own pride will be your downfall.

Second, we are warned about our hypocrisy. Sin always looks for a way to hide itself, and so it breeds hypocrisy, which is to say that it blinds us. A hypocrite is someone who, like Jesus said, has a log in his eye. He can see everyone else's sin, but somehow he is blind to his own. David, the man who had been so zealous for the righteousness of God, now seeks to hide his own sin. Bathsheba is pregnant, so what is David's first impulse? The wheels start turning to find a way to cover this up. He could not risk being exposed as an adulterer. Could you imagine the negative press? This scandal could ruin him. His reputation would be irreparably harmed. So, being king, he put his power to use. He sent for Uriah and called him home from the battle field. He hatched a plot and figured his sin would never harm anyone if he could just cover it up. He figured he could get Uriah to sleep with his wife, and then everyone would just assume the child was Uriah's. One problem that he did not foresee: Uriah was an honorable man. He refused to even enter his house while his fellow men were risking their lives on the battlefield.

Then David tried to get Uriah drunk, thinking maybe then he would go home and sleep with his wife. Still, Uriah refused.

So, David had come to the last resort. He had to cover his sin. No one could know what he had done. He did what he felt he had to do. Uriah had forced him to it. He didn't want to do it, but he had to. He wrote a letter to Joab, the commander of his army, with these instructions, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die." (2 Samuel 10:15b) So Uriah was killed. He was out of the picture, and now David could lawfully take Bathsheba as his own wife, and they could pretend the baby was conceived in wedlock. David could now go on without any consequences for his horrific actions. Right?

There was one glaring problem with David's plan. He forgot one thing: God. **But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.** (2 Samuel 11:27b) God knew what David had done. Turn over to chapter 12.

And the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. ²The rich man had very many flocks and herds, ³but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. ⁴Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." ⁵Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, ⁶and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." ⁷Nathan said to David, "You are the man!" (2 Samuel 12:1-7)

David could cover his sin from other people, but he couldn't hide it from God. We often forget God. We forget that there is one who knows it all, who sees it all, before whose eyes every intention of our hearts and every thought of our minds is exposed. God sent Nathan to David, and the reality of his sin was set before him. "You are the man!" You thought you could cover your sin. You thought you could get away with it. But you are the man! Just because you succeeded in hiding it from others does not mean that you actually covered it.

The moment when David was confronted with the reality of God's judgment upon his sin could have gone one of two ways. David could have continued to seek to cover his sin by his own devices. He could have put Nathan to death just as he did to Uriah. He could have continued running from the consequences of his decisions. But, thanks be to God, that's not what happened. David came to his senses. He remembered his faith, and he broke down.

Here we come to the heart of tonight's message. Turn with me to Psalm 51. If you want to be healed, this is the doorway. The only thing that stands between you and the change God wants for your life is your pride. You are the man. You are the woman. Don't let your pride keep you

from confession. Paul David Tripp says, "Confession is the God-ordained portal to change." Listen to the honest words of David, which I can almost guarantee were written with tears in his eyes.

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 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.
(Psalm 51:1-4)

Those are words that can only come out of our mouths by the grace of God. Our nature abhors confession; that is, our old nature. Everything within us recoils at the suggestion that we are the source of our own troubles. We eagerly seek someone else to blame. Everything within us cries out, "It's not me! It's not me!" What were some of the first words out of Adam's mouth after the fall? "The woman whom You gave to me..." How many of the world's problems have arisen from this one source of pride, which makes us unwilling to confess? How many marriages have come to an end because neither spouse could utter the words, "I am wrong?" "I am the problem." We refuse to acknowledge our own sinfulness. We would rather go to the grave justifying ourselves than go to glory justified by Christ because we refuse to confess.

Not David. In humility and abject honesty, he cried out to God for mercy. I want to point out three brutally honest confessions that have the power to change you.

First, he confessed the **pollution** of his sin. "Wash me thoroughly," he says. "Cleanse me from my sin!" he cries. The language is familiar to us, but let's not just breeze right on by it. Why do we wash something? Because it is dirty. Because it has been defiled. Because it is polluted. David is confessing that he himself is defiled and dirty. He is covered in the guilt and the shame of his sin. He cannot get it off. It is inescapable. He says, "It is ever before me." I'm hopeless, I'm helpless. I cannot get the stain out. He had tried, but he couldn't do it. We waste so much energy trying to cover our sins. We saw the mess David made by trying to remove the sin himself. It ended with an innocent man in the grave. Our efforts to get rid of the pollution of sin always lead to disastrous results.

Today, in our secularistic culture, we try to cover our sins by denying that sin exists. In fact, we have gone so far as to call that which is darkness light. We believe that we have freed ourselves from the pollution of sin by calling it righteousness. Sadly, we cannot change the nature of sin

by trying to redefine it as something good. This is true truth. Darkness does not cease to be darkness just because we call it light. Parents, try this with your kids when they wake up in the night terrified of the darkness. Just tell them, "It's okay, it's not actually dark. It's light." One can perhaps make himself feel better for a moment by denying that he is a sinner, but that does not mean that he has cleansed himself from the pollution of sin. Do you know that you are polluted, and that there is nothing you can do to clean yourself? There is only one way to be cleansed. We cannot do it ourselves. We must be cleansed by the one to whom David cried out for mercy. We must be washed according to His steadfast love, according to His abundant mercy. David confessed the pollution of his sin.

Second, David confessed the **direction** of his sin. "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." (Psalm 51:4a) David was not cheapening his sin with these words. He was not in any way denying the offenses he has committed against other people. Quite the opposite. He is tracing his sin to its ultimate end and object. He is seeing sin in all its foulness by acknowledging that it was essentially an affront to God. Every sin is ultimately aimed toward God. It is an assertion of our own pride, and a denial of God's authority. We cheapen sin by thinking of it only on a horizontal, human plane. It is a lack of faith that causes us to think of sin only in human terms. It's good to affirm that I have sinned against my neighbor, but if I never get to the place of seeing my sin as a deliberate action taken to subvert God's authority, I have not seen it for what it truly is. Sin, truly defined, is always against God.

There is something in us that is always seeking to minimize our sin. I want to excuse myself. There is a dangerous tendency today to psychologize sin, to treat our sin therapeutically. It's just a chemical problem in my brain. I just need a little therapy, or a little medicine. I want to justify myself. I want to explain away my sin as something small and justifiable. It is not assault on God. Everything in me cries out against such a statement. I am not at fault. I am not my problem. I do not hate God. But David allows God to be right. He doesn't fight against God's Word or God's judgments. He accepts them. "So that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment." (Psalm 51:4b)

You see, sin leads us to argue and dispute with God. It leads us to a place of questioning His judgments. We don't like to admit that the only thing we deserve when we stand before the judgment seat of God is death. Everything within us fights against this reality. We don't want to admit that God is right. But He is. He is right. His word is true.

David had come face-to-face with God, and it was only then that he saw his sin for what it truly was. "Against you, you only, have I sinned." His light exposes our darkness. Rather than continuing to justify himself and cover his own sin, David finally gave up and said, "God, you are right! I am wrong." I am the man! I am a liar, and you are true. Let God be true and every man a liar. Confession. It is the first step on the path of freedom. It frees us by bringing us into the truth.

John makes this very clear at the start of 1 John, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8) "If we say we have not sinned, we make him a

liar, and his word is not in us.” (1 John 1:10) I pray that no one here is deceiving himself tonight. I pray that there is no one here who does not have God’s Word in him.

Third, David confessed the **origin** of his sin. Get ready to dive deep into the teaching of God’s Word together here. Look at verse 5.

⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
(Psalm 51:5)

That is deep doctrine. That is special revelation. David’s words are true of every human being who has ever lived, save one. We are all brought forth in iniquity. The corruption of sin is upon us from the moment of conception. Paul unpacks this in Romans 5.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned. (Romans 5:12)

Paul is making the same bold statement about sin that David made. Our nature fell in Adam. We all sinned when Adam sinned. We were all in Adam because Adam is our father. We enter life condemned. When we came into being as a zygote in our mother’s womb, we were sinners. I know what our natural response to this doctrine is. “That’s not fair! Shouldn’t we only be punished for only for our own sins?” To which the Scriptures respond, “Let God be true and every man a liar.”

Jesus taught the same thing. We just studied John 3 together, where Jesus had a late evening appointment with Nicodemus, the distinguished Pharisee. What did Jesus tell Nicodemus? You must be born again. The necessity of this second birth arises from the origin of our sin. We are conceived in sin. The entire human race is born in sin. In Adam, we are born condemned, and we deserve nothing from God except the wages of sin, which is death. Jesus went on to tell Nicodemus, “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” (John 3:18) I emphasize that word already. Apart from faith in the name of the only Son of God, we are already condemned. We are condemned from the start, from the very start. From Genesis 3, the condemnation of sin has passed upon us all. We need a new Adam. We need a better Adam.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that’s exactly what He has given us. The story doesn’t end with Adam’s sin. Look at how Paul concludes Romans 5.

¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. ²⁰ Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so

that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

See the true and better Adam! Jesus was not conceived in sin. He was conceived in holiness by the Holy Spirit. In Him, and Him alone, grace reigns through righteousness leading to eternal life. God justifies us in Christ. We cannot justify ourselves. Whereas we were condemned in Adam, we are justified, declared righteous, in Christ. Only faith in Christ can make us right with God because of what Christ has done for us. There is only one way for the pollution of sin, which alienates us from God, to be removed. It is for God Himself to do it for us. Blessed be His Name, He has done it! Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more!

David has confessed the pollution, the direction, and the origin of his sin, and now he is on the path of transformation, true change, and freedom. Look at David's next words.

**⁶Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.
Psalm 51:6**

Truth in the inward being. Wisdom in the secret heart. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." David's darkness has been brought into the light by confession. He now has the truth in his inward being, and wisdom in the secret heart. What he had tried to cover up is now brought to light. What was secret is now known. The painful rebuke of Nathan was God's wisdom. It was the truth David needed to hear. What about you? Has God taught you this wisdom in the secret heart? Or are you still in hiding? Have you seen your sin for what it truly is? Have you come face-to-face with God in Christ and seen your sin? Have you confessed to God that you are polluted and that there is nothing you can do to make yourself clean? Have you come before the throne of God in utter self-abasement and confessed that you have sinned against God alone? Have you confessed that you were conceived in sin?

Confession is one of God's greatest gifts to you. If you go on running from this truth, you will never change. If you will just be honest and confess what deep down you know to be true, you will be healed. You will be changed. You will be justified. Remember the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector? ¹⁰ "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:10-14) The tax collector, not the Pharisee, had truth in the inward being. He went home justified.

God has already provided for your forgiveness. The truth will set you free. Look at verse 7. Here, David provides us with an Old Testament shadow or picture of how God provides for our forgiveness.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
(Psalm 51:7)

The use of the hyssop plant to sprinkle blood goes all the way back to the Passover. The Israelites used hyssop to dip into the blood of the lamb and spread it on the top and both sides of the doorframe.

We, too, must be sprinkled with blood—the blood of the Lamb. The blood of Jesus makes us clean. He washes us whiter than snow. David looked ahead to this promise. We look back on it. Those of us who are in Christ have been sprinkled clean with His blood. Look at Hebrews 10.

¹⁹Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22)

If God washes you, you will be whiter than snow. If He sprinkles you, purges you with hyssop, you will be clean. Do you want to be healed? Do you want to change? Receive the gift of confession. It is God's grace that is drawing you. He is inviting you to come by the way of confession. Let go of your pride.

Or, maybe you feel you are too far gone to come back to the Lord. Maybe you feel your sin is too great. Look at David, the adulterer, the murderer, and know that God can forgive you. Your sin is not too great for the Lord's grace. Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. Confess your sins to the Lord, and He is faithful and just to forgive your sin and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.