

David, Sin and Struggle

Psalm 51

- Introduction

- Have you ever thought about how someone would be forgiven for murder? Normally, if you ask forgiveness, you ask the person you've wronged. You lie to your wife, she's the one who is able to forgive you. What happens when the only one who is able to forgive you is gone? Where can you go? How can you move forward? Or what if someone is not willing, or not able, to forgive you for what you've done? What can you do? By asking these questions, I think, we can begin to understand why David writes that he has sinned against God alone. God is the only one who is able to offer anything close to forgiveness to David for his sins. If he is going to be forgiven, he will be forgiven from and through God.

- Leader Prep Help

- Even though Psalm 51 is our main text, the story of David and Bathsheba is told in 2 Samuel 11-12. Looking briefly at that text, notice in v. 1 that the author begins his telling of David's sin by pointing out that he sent all of Israel off to war, but remained home himself. The call of God on his people at this time was to continue the conquest of Canaan. Many of the people of God are giving their lives in obedience to God while David, meant to be their leader, is living as though the nation is at peace. Notice the contrast between David and Uriah—the king of the Israelites and a convert from another nation—yet Uriah refuses to sleep with his wife or in his own bed out of solidarity for his fellow soldiers a respect for cleanliness laws. This should remind us, first, that temptation often comes to us when we forget about the spiritual war, when we are off our guard, apart from our community. This should also speak a powerful word to leaders in the church, to remain on the vanguard and not allow your position in the church to excuse you from the day to day tasks and struggles of the faith. Don't neglect your first calling as a Christian to pursue your second as a minister.
- Notice in 2 Samuel 11:4 that Bathsheba had been cleansing herself "from her uncleanness," meaning she was ritually washing herself after her period, which would have made her unclean according to the Jewish law (See Lev. 15:19-28). (This isn't a condemnation of women or menstruation, but rather a concession that women would be excused from having sex or performing several tasks while on their period.) Why note this? Several reasons: one, this tells us for sure that the child is not Uriah's. Also, it shows Bathsheba's godliness--she was careful to follow the law, and eager to rejoin the assembly of God.

This continues the contrast between David and this family—as they pursue God, David only rejects him. This note also gives the impression that perhaps sex was not consensual on her part, since she is actively obeying the law when David sends for her.

- Turning to Psalm 51, the first thing to note, in v. 1, is that David calls upon the Lord’s “steadfast love” for forgiveness. The word used here speaks of a kind of love that endures all and is used throughout the Old Testament to describe the way in which God loves his people and creation. David, rightly, realizes that forgiveness would come, not because of anything he would do, but because of the nature of our God.
 - One of the most remarkable things David writes is that he’s sinned against God alone. The language there is emphatic, like italics—I’ve sinned against you, you alone. Obviously, David’s sin has affected other people—Bathsheba, Uriah, the soldiers with him--so why would he say his sin is against God alone? I think part of it is a recognition that true forgiveness is only found in God, and only able to be given from and through him.
 - Hyssop was commonly used at the tabernacle in cleansing ceremonies as a means of sprinkling water or blood on people, so when David asks God to purge him with hyssop, he is recognizing his need for God to wash him and atone for him, along with his inability to do so.
 - Throughout the Old Testament, every time a sacrifice is given to God, it has to be perfect and blameless, so David’s insistence that his broken spirit would be an acceptable sacrifice is striking. Why would God want us to be broken, when every other sacrifice is perfect? In part, it’s a recognition that we are in need of the perfect sacrifice of God and utterly incapable of pleasing him without mercy.
- Discussion Questions
- Read Psalm 51
 - Our sin is more devastating than we realize
 - Why would David pray in verse 4 “against you, you only, have I sinned?” His sin certainly affects other people, so in what way is his sin only against God?
 - To be a Christian, do you have to believe that everyone is sinful? How sinful is everyone—are people totally depraved, or do most people have some good in them, too?
 - Is all sin equal, or are some sins worse than others? Why do you think the way you do? How does the answer to this question affect the Christian practices of evangelism, accountability, and confession?

Tuesday, October 3, 2017

- Alex quoted a few times in his sermon that God wills “the entire life of every believer to be one of repentance.” What does a lifestyle of repentance look like? What can we do to cultivate repentance in our own lives and in our Hope community?
- God’s love is more redemptive than we can imagine
 - Psalm 51:10-11, David asks God not to cast him away, or remove the Holy Spirit from him. Why would he ask that? Can we ever lose the Holy Spirit in us, and how can we pray this prayer today?
 - Looking at verse 7, why can’t we wash ourselves of sin? Is there nothing we can do to seek forgiveness, or are we totally dependent upon God to act (what is our part in forgiveness)?
 - What can we do as a church to assure each other of the forgiveness of God? How does the assurance of forgiveness affect the way we pray to God from the depths of sin?
- Our atonement is ineffective
 - In verse 16, David claims that God isn’t pleased with his sacrifices. Why would God reject the very practices he proscribed for the forgiveness of sins? What are the implications of this in our own worship?
 - Looking at verse 17, what is the role of contrition, or brokenness, in the practice of confession--if we don’t confess in the right way, are we not forgiven? What is the role of contrition in apologizing to others in the church?
 - What are some ways in which we attempt to atone for our own sins rather than depending upon Christ for atonement?