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Psalm 51

A Heart of Repentance

Intro: As I recall my childhood, kids shared a handful of common fears—arising from cultural influences. (1) Nuclear War fallout. *The Day After*. (2) Killer Bees from Mexico - media sensationalized it (3) Stranger Danger or getting kidnapped by devil worshippers.

But another odd fear that kids my age shared was sinking to their death in quicksand. Anyone else have that fear? Why were we so afraid? Only 2 deaths from quicksand were *ever* documented.

It wasn't a Journalist like Geraldo Rivera or a *60 Minutes* episode that scared us. It was a 1984 movie, *The Neverending Story*

Two things about that movie stuck in my mind. The song, which you can't unhear and a gripping quicksand scene you can't unsee.

That scene traumatized an entire generation. Here's the story...

SLIDE: The hero in the story, Atreyu, along with his trusted sidekick, Artax the horse, are on a quest to save a dying world from something called "The Nothing." On their journey, they must pass through The SWAMPS of SADNESS.

SLIDE: The swamps are known for making anyone who enters feel overwhelming sadness and despair—to lose the will to go on.

SLIDE: As they enter the swamp Artax suddenly stops, refusing to continue. The sadness is beginning to overtake him. Atreyu desperately struggles to free him, but his horse just sinks deeper.

It's an absolutely horrific scene, emotionally intense. But what makes it even worse is when you realize that Artax is being swallowed up by his own despair. Atreyu begs his beloved horse to move, fight, resist...He hugs him. He scolds him. He pulls the reins. He pleads. He even insults him! But to no avail.

Artax can't overcome the grief and ultimately lets it consume him.

He dies. Maybe it was because I was 9 years old and had a horse of my own, or maybe it was good storytelling combined with good acting and a good music score. But that scene got me.

SLIDE: As the scene ends, we see Atreyu sitting on a log gazing at the spot his horse had sun into the mud, crying.

It would be one thing to see Artax die in battle but something about his psychological turmoil and loss of the will to live was harder.

Not many people die from quicksand. But multitudes actually get stuck in sin and begin to sink in silence. Guilt, condemnation, shame, fear, and maybe pride. Cain. Judas. The whole world in Gen. 6. And in Rev. 16. They refuse or see no hope of escape.

Sin seeks to swallow us up the way that swamp swallowed Artax. It seems hopeless. But there's a way out. Repentance. Psalm. 51.

Here's the back-story to Psalm 51. David had sinned. He took another man's wife, got her pregnant, arranged her husband's death, and then for about a year acted like nothing was wrong.

David saw her bathing. He should have looked away and walked away. He did not. He inquires about her. He discovered she was married. He knew she had a husband—at war. *He* should have been at war! Everything about this story shows us God gave him opportunity after opportunity to turn away. He didn't. He rushed headlong into sin. But God sent Nathan to confront him...

And now David is coming back to God with a broken heart. David is bruised and broken by his sin and has lost his way. He's a wounded man. He's a desperate man. Sin has wearied him. He wants to get out. He wants to come home to God. He wants free.

SLIDE: *To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.*

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. ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. ⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. ⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. ¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. ¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. ¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. ¹⁸ Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem; ¹⁹ then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar. —Psalm 51

SLIDE: If you're sinking, 3 considerations can help you out. (1) WHO can get you out. (2) HOW did you get here? (3) WHAT awaits you? Psalm 51 guides us through those questions/answers.

SLIDE: To be clear...this will require humility, honestly, and hope. Only the gospel can produce those qualities in sufficient measure. Remembering that Jesus loved you to the very end and that he justified you with his eyes wide open, knowing the worst things about you, and that if God is for us, nothing can be against us...

Pt. #1. WHO Can Get You Out?: Look at verse 1 again. “Have mercy on me” is literally in Hebrew. “Show me Grace.” According to (or *because of*) Your Mercy. According to your Steadfast love HESED. Who can get you out? Well *YOU* can't, that's for sure.

You got yourself into this mess. You need outside help. And you need help of the highest kind. You're *cooked*. So you turn to a God who is willing. Ready. Open. David does not appeal to his position as king, or to his past as God's ambassador. He doesn't cite any

of his good deeds or remind God of what a good shepherd he was. This is completely vertical. No horizontal nature to this at all. No. He needs God's mercy and grace. Not his own earnestness. Listen, we'll never be *earnest* enough. But God is *merciful* enough. “abundant mercy” = *unending compassion* In Heb. No caboose!

He doesn't barter with God. “Forgive me and I'll do better, I promise.” He appeals to three things about God. He is gracious, loving, and merciful. Are you overwhelmed by those truths?

No humble sinner has ever come to God and heard the words, “Not now. I'm tired of you.” No broken human has ever said to God, “I hear you're a gracious, loving, merciful God. I see it on the cross. So, let me tell you *everything*” and been turned away. Not ever! Jesus promised “*Whoever comes to me I will in no wise cast out!*” 1 John promises “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*”

David used all 3 of the words God used to reveal Himself in Exodus 34. “merciful and gracious, abounding in steadfast love

SLIDE: “Repentance means turning from as much as you know of your sin, to give as much as you know of yourself, to as much as you know of your God.” — J.I. Packer

SLIDE: “Are you a life-long student of God's steadfast love, kindness, and grace? No? Then you are probably not repenting as you should.” Forget that God is kind and you are cooked, friends.

His kindness leads us to repentance. That's in Romans 2. How insane is that? Not his wrath. Not his justice. Not his anger. True repentance hopes in God's mercy. It's all we have, friends.

We must spend time basking in God's love. If grace was sunshine, David always had a tan. God's grace marked his life.

Now to be clear, when I say only God can get you “out of this,” what I mean is that only God can give you what you need. You need cleansing. You need restoration. You need to be FREED. To be unburdened. To be forgiven. You NEED what God is willing to GIVE. So go to HIM. Go to him *first* and *stay* with him.

Pt. #2. HOW Did You Get Here? This is all about honesty. God desires truth in the covered parts. vs. 6 And if you're newer to GraceLife, please...listen carefully. This could save your life. The majority of this Psalm is David coming clean. It's a radical honesty that you won't find in any other literature in the world. David makes no excuses. He's not careful or edited. This psalm was not ran through the Jerusalem PR department. David's tired of pretending.

Now it takes some pain and agony for most people to get to this point. And David was no different. Remember...he spent a year pretending that everything was okay. He covered his sin.

When we neglect repentance/confession, things are not well with us. It will tear us to shreds. Psalm 32 shows us. He admits there that when he was silent and refused to confess and repent of his sin, his bones wasted away. He was miserable. God's hand was heavy upon him. His strength was dried up. He was languishing. He was coming apart. Coming unraveled. And so will we. Mark it!

When you internalize sin, ladies and gentlemen, it will absolutely tear you to pieces. And thank God it does. A good sign of life!

I wonder, my friends. If there's someone here today. And you have carried a terrible secret for some time. You're loaded down with several spiritual tons of guilt, shame, and condemnation. You've never told anyone what you've done. Maybe you're a man with a secret, hidden pornography addiction. Or maybe it's self-medication of some kind. Pills. Alcohol. Or maybe you're a bitter person who nurses a grudge. Or you're angry or greedy. Jealous. Or maybe you find it incredibly difficult to tell the truth and have built your life on a web of lies and deception. Or unfaithfulness.

Or maybe you have other secrets. You'd shredded your conscience and then you scarred it over where there are no longer sensitivities. But the Spirit of God within you will not let you rest. Hallelujah! There's hope for you, friend. You gotta get honest.

SLIDE: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." -Luther

That truth sparked the reformation. Repentance is not just a one-time event at conversion. It continues our entire lives. We still sin!

The word "repentance" means *to turn*. A radical change of mind that leads inevitably to a radical change of behavior. It bears fruit. We still have things to turn from and a Savior to turn towards!

This is not damage control. David was not seeking control. He has surrendered all that. He wanted to be clean. He wants to be free. He wants his joy restored. He wants to be in right fellowship again.

He's ready to come clean. The floodgates are lifted here. David uses three powerful words for sin here in Hebrew that cover a range of themes. I think it will prove helpful to look at them.

Transgression = Stepping over the line of what God has forbidden. Willfully crossing boundaries. Rebel. Do not park here.

Iniquity = Crooked. Bent. Wrong. Twisted. Perversity. Moral Impurity. There's something wrong with you. You delight to rebel.

Sin = Failure to do what God has commanded us. Inability. Missing the mark. Falling short. Not being able to hit the mark.

That means that our sin is fundamentally due to what is inside of us. Not around us. Not our history. Or jobs. Or family situations.

IOW: My biggest problem and your biggest problem... is not the world I live in, or the people I live around, or the circumstances in my life; my biggest problem is ME. David says sin is a matter of the heart. My biggest problem lives inside of me, not outside of me

Because, listen...if those things are the source of the problem, then changing them should do the trick, right? Good as new. New job. New spouse. New neighbors. New car. New church, pastor.

Elisabeth Elliot said "[The secret is Christ in me, not me in another set of circumstances.](#)" Nothing but a renewed heart will fix us.

Our circumstances don't need to be changed *necessarily*. We do.

That's why verses 6, 10, 17 talk about the inner heart. Cleansing. Renewal. Deep, abiding change. It's deep surgery. At our CORE. Now remember this point. *HOW* did you get here? Who is to blame? He doesn't talk about all the pressures of being king.

He is taking personal responsibility. “MY sins” He is not cleaning this up or sterilizing it. No excuses. He calls it sin.

The root cause was not Bathsheba’s beauty. Or the positioning of her rooftop. Or immodesty. She wasn’t sunbathing or enticing him. She was cleaning herself from menstrual impurity, which also tells us she was not already pregnant. David is the baby’s father.

What does David long for? What is David asking God to do? To blot out his sins. To cleanse him. He wants the stain of sin gone.

I was doing some finish work in a good friend’s home in the last church we served in. One of the guys that was working with me tipped over a can of dark oak stain (Mahogany I think) onto a light-colored wooden floor. We tried everything to remove that stain. It wasn’t working. It was there for life. We apologized and he was gracious. We agreed on a nice area rug to cover the stain.

David is not asking for covering. He is asking for that sin to be cleansed. Wiped away. To erase. To abolish. To annihilate in a metaphorical sense. To Destroy. The Hebrew word “blot out” carries all those meanings. Same words God used to describe what he was going to do to all the people on earth through the Flood. Blot them out. They would disappear forever. Same word for people in Canaan. David wants that for his sin. Can you relate?

Have you ever been so dirty, smelly, and disgusting? You just want to be clean. That hot shower water coming down on you and doing its work. Remember Pig pen? He was happy in his filth. Not David

He wants to be separated from his sin because he knows that sin is a great separator. From God. From others. From yourself.

Repentance craves FREEDOM not CONTROL. This was public. He was way past covering up his sin. He put it to music. David wasn’t crafting or staging this for publicity. He wasn’t crying into the cameras and apologizing to Uriah’s family. “Against You only”

David is praying, “I am false and full of sin. I am not who I want to be. I’m not how I want to be. I need Your mercy and I need it in deep, deep places and in powerful applications.” Listen...

God desires truth. Where? Where it matters. Deep inside us. Not cosmetic surgery. Not some bo-tox a nip/tuck. A miracle.

vs. 4. “I’ve done what is EVIL in your sight.” EVIL. That’s a hard word, isn’t it? A little humiliating? A little embarrassing? We’re rather say, “I made a mistake. Bad week. Slipped up.” We want to manage our sins. Present them in the best light. Politicians...

David is using serious words to describe what he’s done. We can too. He is saying, “This was not a fluke or a fumble. This came from my core. I know where this came from. I was born in sin.”

I need grace in the deepest places, in the coldest hidden corners.

David refused to re-define sin. He calls it what God calls it. Evil. He sees it as God sees it. That’s the beginning of repentance. Stop lying to yourself, to God, and others. Come clean. We must see ourselves as we really are in repentance. No facade.

Because if God is gracious and merciful, we can stop lying to ourselves. Let’s trust God enough to use blunt words. **It’s the only way to get free.** Walk in the light. Get honest. Stay real.

You *can* confess your sins, because Jesus died for your sins. You might have one secret sin you’ve covered over in denial and avoidance. Bring it to him, and tell him *everything*. He will cleanse you, he will guide you, and you *will* be free & useful again.

The air we breath as Westerners and especially as Americans is professionalism. Manage the damage. PR rep. You get caught, you cry. You issue a statement. You check into rehab. You do community service. You save face...Rinse. Repeat. No change.

You can be disgusted by the sin outside of you while being okay with the sin inside you. That’s why God sent Nathan to. David.

Pt. #3. WHAT Awaits You? That depends? Either joy or more misery. God rejoices to give humble, repentant sinners their lives back, better than before. Do you have that hope in repentance?

Freedom, renewal, and restoration. Rejoicing. Relief. New fellowship with God. Forgiveness. Hope. Purgings. Right spirit.

GOSPEL APPLICATION: Sinclair Ferguson called this Psalm a guiding star to finding the gospel. It has it all. Repentance. Confession. Humility. Honesty. Hope. Cleansing. Forgiveness. Assurance. Joy. Security. Restoration. Renewal. But we have to read the Bible in it's full context to know the grounds for all of that.

Some theologians believed David broke every commandment. What treason. What betrayal. One of his mighty men. A man of integrity. He sent to the front lines...to be executed like a rebel. Like a traitor. Like a criminal. For getting in the way. Forgivable?

David's sin was a capital offense. Adultery required death. Murder required death. Here David stands, a forgiven sinner who lived. He shed innocent blood. Yet he is walking away filled with joy. How?

Because someone stood in his place. **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.** vs. 16, 17

God doesn't delight in our sacrifices. Not our blood. They aren't enough. He will only accept a perfect sacrifice. His Son's.

The difference between a converted person and an unconverted person is not that one sins and the other does not, but one repents of his sin. So the question is not one of sinning but of repenting.

That's why Psalm 51 is in the Bible – to guide us there and keep us there. Humble, honest, and hopeful. True freedom.

Some say Goliath was David's greatest victory. I think Psalm 51 was. It came through sweet surrender. And did David ever have a story to tell. **"Then I will teach transgressors your ways."** And you can too.

Let's Pray...