

Communion Preparatory Service

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[0 : 01] Well, seeking God's help, let's turn back to Psalm 51. And tonight we're going to split it over three sections, tonight and tomorrow night and on Sunday evening, Lord willing.

And you could say the first six verses this evening, especially the first two verses. A person's car will reveal quite a lot about them.

Some of you, I'm sure, keep your car in pristine condition. Others of you just let the rain wash off the dirt. But there comes a point when we must get the hose out or head along to the power wash at the petrol station or even go through a drive-through car wash.

You can use all sorts of scents and smells or wax and gloss. In just a few minutes, you can take a step back and just see how much better it looks.

But no matter how much you hose, scrub or wash the outside of the car, the inside remains just the same.

[1 : 17] The cleansing must go deeper. In Psalm 51, David digs deep and he lays bare his heart in prayer before God.

On the outside, people would have looked at David and thought, King, handsome, successful. But what David is doing in this psalm is not a case of making himself look more presentable.

With better rule-keeping or acts of kindness. Or being more disciplined in his worship or church attendance. Because David knows what the Bible says.

He knew the God that he was crying out to. The Bible says that man looks on the outside. But God looks at our hearts. And so David here in Psalm 51, he digs deep inside as he begins this prayer.

And I want to ask three questions looking at the beginning of David's prayer. Very simple, very obvious questions. The first question is, who does he pray to?

[2 : 35] And so look at it in your Bibles. It says, David prays, have mercy on me, O God. So David begins not talking about the past.

Not asking for things that may be in the future. But David starts on his knees. Certainly that's the posture of his heart as he cries out to God.

Have mercy on me, O God. This is a man who knows where to go. Straight to the throne of God. And as we've sung some of it, and as we've read through the whole of Psalm 51 already this evening.

You can look at it over this weekend. But you'll notice, David doesn't take his eyes off the Lord all the way through this prayer, this song. You'll be able to count no less than 29 direct references of David communicating and referencing the Lord.

Not to mention the indirect references that there are to our God. He is fully focused on God. As we alluded to in our own prayer at the start of this evening.

[3 : 52] What basis does David have? What basis does David, a man like David, have to come to our holy God?

We've read about him. We read a wee bits of 2 Samuel 11 there, didn't we? We read about the kind of man that David is. Yes, he's a king. And yes, he's been successful.

And yes, he's handsome. But David's committed adultery. David's gone and murdered Uriah. We'll think about these exact details of what he's done later on.

But what kind of man is this that thinks he can come before a holy God? And yet we don't need to think about David explicitly.

Because a congregation like this just needs to think about themselves. And their own lives. And their own sin. Without going into this, I tried not to.

[4 : 57] David's specific sins yet. You see what he says there in verse 5. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

He's saying he was a sinner at birth. Now, not because he was such a bad baby. But because of what we term as original sin. Because, as Paul writes, through the one man's disobedience, through Adam's sin, the many were made sinners.

You see, we sin because we're sinners. We're not sinners because we have sinned.

We sin because we're sinners. We're not sinners because we sin. You have such a little grasp of the sin that we commit.

We talk, maybe even in prayer to God. Certainly when we talk to others. We talk about our trips. Our mistakes. Our errors.

[6 : 12] But God detests your sin. God detests it. He cannot be in a relationship with us because of it.

He sent his own son into the world to deal with it. In January, we were trying to go on holiday. So we had to fly from Edinburgh. And I was watching the weather for the days leading up to it. It was that week or so in January that we had all the snow. And in the two days before we were meant to drive down the A9, the snow gates were closed in one or two parts.

Regardless of my travel plans. These snow gates being closed in various parts of the country, it means you cannot go through. And in that situation, the gates being closed might actually save your life.

But because of what God has done through Jesus, the gate to him is now open for you to enter through it.

[7 : 20] And if you do enter through it, it will save your soul. David can call out not because he's the king, but because he is a child, a child of God.

In the prophet Jeremiah, he says in 33.3, Call on me and I will answer you. Call on God and he will answer you. Isn't that amazing?

Just think about it. Isn't it amazing that God invites you to call out to him, to cry out to him in your desperation and in your delight, with sorrow in your heart and with singing in your lips, despite the sins you have committed, despite the sinners that we are.

He says, call on me and I will answer you. David knows his God well.

We can tell that in how he pleads in verses 1 and 2. He pleads about God's character that he has a knowledge of and he no doubt has had experience of, experienced the blessing of in the past too.

[8 : 38] You notice the two ways he describes God. He uses this conjunction of according to. He says, have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy.

This word love, steadfast love, I'm sure you've heard this Hebrew term hesed, which refers to the covenant love of God, his loyal love, and the NIV his unfailing love.

It's his covenant mercy. This is David's well phrased request in the midst of his own brokenness, in the midst of his own sin.

He's appealing to this covenant keeping God. According to your steadfast love, have mercy on me, he's crying out. This covenant, God has made these promises, most notably to Noah, and to Abraham, to the nation of Israel, even to David himself.

Just a few chapters earlier in 2 Samuel that we were reading, God makes this covenant with David. He makes a promise with David. And he promises David that through him, through his line, through one of his descendants, is going to come someone who is going to sit on the throne forever, David.

[10 : 10] One of your descendants. There's that promise in 2 Samuel 7, and then in 2 Samuel 11, this is what we read of King David. So David now appeals to the God whose love never fails, from a man who has failed again, to the unbreakable love of God from a broken, sinful man.

And he carries on, according to your abundant mercy, or your abundant compassion. David repeats the same thought here again, in line 3, as he did there in line 2.

David is longing for this fresh outpouring from his loving, and compassionate, merciful God.

David's not going to minimize the sin that he's committed. He knows what he's done. He says that in verse 3, for I know my transgressions. And he's feeling the guilt of it, the shame of it.

But David also knows this, and this is what you should be reminded of this evening and over this weekend. David also knows that no matter how many sins he may have committed, there is far more mercy and compassion to be received from God.

[11 : 38] See, we must pray. We must resist the devil, firm in our faith. We must flee from him, because he is undoubtedly gnawing away at some of you in your hearts, even tonight as you sit in

church, certainly as you may be before you came to church, and even others who haven't come here at all.

Who can't bring themselves, perhaps, to profess their faith. Who can't bring themselves even to come in the door, because they are being told by Satan too many sins from you?

Too many times you've committed that and done that and been there. Too many. The hymn writer says, our sins, they are many.

But the Bible says, his mercy is more. And that's true for you. That's what David cries out for here. And put that picture in your mind of when you've seen that, a waterfall. And it seems like it's never going to end. The mercy of God toward you never ends.

[12:59] His mercy, his love, his compassion for you never ends. Your sins, many, many, many.

His mercy is even more than that. And once you've experienced it, you don't forget it. David sings about it often.

To give you just two quotes, he sings in Psalm 103, the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. In Psalm 145, the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in love.

But ultimately, we see it through Jesus Christ. He was moved with mercy. He was moved with compassion on many occasions as we read of his life and ministry through the gospel.

He was merciful. He was compassionate towards the sick to relieve the demon-possessed. And even when you remember those large crowds as he fed them, the 5,000, the 4,000, he looked at them, and this is what Jesus said.

[14:10] He looked at them with compassion, with mercy. They are like sheep without a shepherd. And David, who is crying out and pleading to this merciful God, he says in these well-known words to us, the Lord is my shepherd.

Have you experienced his love and his compassion? Is the Lord your shepherd? Then continue or cry out to him.

Be saved, be forgiven, and be in a relationship with him. So this is how he begins. Who to? It's to God. Secondly, and again simply, what's the question?

What does he pray about? Well, it's obvious. What does he pray about? We have this very relatable psalm because David's sin with Bathsheba and her husband Uriah.

The details, he had sinned in adultery, in murder, in trying to cover it up, and in the hardness of his heart, lacking any repentance until now.

[15:29] It took the bold confrontation of Nathan the prophet to shake David from this and yet once he was shaken, David came in honesty before God. Remember where David was at this point in his life.

David was in the height of his service for the Lord. He was a man after God's own heart. As we mentioned, God had made a covenant with him from which Jesus was going to come from his line and generations.

David brought peace with and to the surrounding nations during his reign. He led Israel to many military victories. Everything seemed to be going well for David.

His reputation as a man and as a king was on the up, up, up until he looked down, until he fell into sin and let Satan get in.

When he should have had his armor on spiritually and literally, he left the door open to temptation. The lingering look led to lust, adultery and murder.

[16:41] when you read the narrative in 2 Samuel in full, it strikes you because Bathsheba is repeatedly referred to as Uriah's wife.

Even when she gives birth to the son that she has had with David, she's still referred to as Uriah's wife. The Bible doesn't and we must never be tempted to sweep sin under the carpet.

But David comes out of hiding. It takes him over nine months to get to this point. He didn't confess or profess until Nathan told him, you are the man.

But now look what David does. Really poetically, he lays down a trilogy of words, three words that describe the wrong that he has done before God.

At the end of verse 1 and into 2, look at the three words he uses to describe what he has done. His transgressions, his iniquity, and his sin.

[17:55] He speaks of his rebellious actions, what is crooked or bent, what is missing the mark. at Christmas, especially, although it's on most of the year too, the World Darts Championship is on.

That's probably when I focus on the darts the most. And so you're watching it and you're watching the players and their incredible talent and being able to hit the exact spot they're wanting more often than not.

And then when you're finally getting behind one of the players and you're wanting him and willing him to win, you see as the camera zooms in, the dart is flying and the camera is there zoomed in onto the double bed that it's expecting the player to go to.

And then the dart finally comes into shot and more often than not they hit it. but sometimes agonizingly it lands just the wrong side of the wire and it's painful to watch because they've just missed.

But we don't just miss the mark with our sin. We are far and wide. One of the young lads in my congregation told me he got a dart board for Christmas and then his parents told me they forgot to put the cork board behind the dart board and so now there's all these holes on the wall because he was far and wide off even the boards never mind the bullseye.

[19 : 41] We could have a trilogy of words and many many more to describe our sin, our shortcomings, our failings. But thankfully somebody has hit the mark for us.

And as Paul continued, through the one man's obedience, that's Jesus, we are made righteous. But our sin does have an effect.

Our sin affects ourselves. That sense of shame will set in. Romans 7, no wretched man that I am. Sin affects our work, it affects our relationships with other people, but most importantly, sin affects our relationship with God.

It destroys our relationship with God until we have come to Jesus. David's sin affected him.

Bathsheba, Huraia, the child that was born, his family, the nation, and his relationship with the Lord. It had a ripple effect, just like when you throw a stone into the water and the circles just get wider and wider.

[21 : 01] Sin leaves scars. to think of a simple illustration of that.

When I was only nine years old or something like that, maybe around the age of some of the boys here, my eldest brother is five years older than me, and when I was, we would cycle down to school and we would come down our hill, even though he was older and bigger, fitter, and stronger.

Even as a child, my pride set in wanting to beat him, wanting to race him and get there first, and so I was desperate to overtake him, but I knew that once you go down to the bottom of the road, there's a corner, and that's the home straight, and if you're not ahead by the time you get to the corner, there's no chance.

And so we were getting, I was desperate to overtake him, so I went faster and faster and I didn't slow down for the corner. And when we came to it, I fell off my bike, I skidded along the pavement, and my head dangled over the curb onto the main roads.

As I fell, the driver, I assume, swerved to avoid me. He happened to be the head teacher of the next primary school, and he did the great privilege for me and stopped to tell my head teacher what I had done.

[22 : 28] My sin that day had harmed me. It could so easily have been catastrophic for me, for the driver. But apart from that scene and the row I got being scarred into my mind, I do have a physical scar on my hand from that day, which should, but I don't think it does.

It should remind me forever the sinful man that I am. David's experience should be a warning to us. David, nor I, nor you, glory in the grime of our sin, but we can glory in the grace of our God.

Jesus is now the one with the scars in his hands and in his feet, as a reminder for us now and will be for eternity that he has taken away all our sin.

If we have laid it before him, it is by his wounds that we are healed. So who does he pray to? He prays to God.

And what does he pray about? He prays about his sin. So David begins by praying to God about his sin. But thirdly, what does he pray for?

[23 : 51] He prays for mercy. He prays for forgiveness. Depending on the translation of this opening word, it does seem to be interchangeable between mercy or grace.

But these two words are just two sides of the same coin, really, anyway. Mercy is when we receive what we do not receive what we do deserve.

Mercy is when we do not receive what we do deserve. because of our sin. We deserve separation from God.

We deserve a place in hell. We deserve eternal punishment. We don't receive it because Jesus has taken our place.

Equally, grace is when we do receive what we don't deserve. we receive a relationship with God. Our place in heaven.

[24 : 57] Eternal life. God's riches at Christ's expense. Now, if there was a trilogy, three words, three terms for the wrong that David had done, you can see that he matches it with three words as he appeals for mercy.

there in verse 1, 2, and 3, or verse 1 and 2, blot out my transgressions, wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

Blot out means the complete removal. Not just like a line stroke through a word and you can still see and make out what it says. Not even tipex, so it's covered over but it's still there underneath, but blotted out from any and every records.

It's the same Hebrew word here that's used, that David uses here, blot out, that is used in the story of Noah's ark. Where God, because of the wickedness of humanity, he's going to blot out the wicked mankind.

And only those who are going to be saved are those who are covered by God, who are there shielded in the ark. And so now again David is asking for the wickedness to be blotted out, his sin to be blotted out.

[26 : 29] And secondly, wash me, wash me thoroughly from my iniquity. Maybe more so maybe some you've left tonight. Certainly some that will be there on Sunday afternoon as you wash the dishes.

There are some pans that are just a pain that some of you leave to soak in the hope that just by leaving it it's going to somehow be better or really hoping that someone else will do it for you. Because you know it needs to be scrubbed, that a rinse under the tap isn't going to work. You need to put effort in. As it says here, thoroughly wash.

And that's what David is getting at when he's appealing to God, thoroughly wash me. And thirdly, he uses the word cleanse. Cleanse me from my sin.

And we'll think about this again later on this weekend as it comes up. But this is a ritual term, a ritual term when the priest in the temple or the tabernacle would pronounce somebody clean.

[27 : 39] Whatever made the Old Testament believer unclean, once the sacrifice was provided and the ritual performed in the temple, then the individual could be pronounced clean.

But all that ritual, all of these sacrifices, all of that blood that has been poured out was leading us to Calvary, where Jesus was crucified for you to be cleansed from all of your sin.

Well, notice, just as we come to a finish, notice the personal element in all of this. Now, this isn't just a sermon on a Friday night for the congregation, but that this is for you as an individual.

Notice how David lays claim to all of us. He says, my transgressions, my iniquities, my sin.

He's not passing the buck anymore. This isn't a communal repentance. repentance. This isn't the congregation coming and saying sorry to the Lord. This is David. And this must be you and me.

[29 : 05] This is his mess, his fault, his sin. And as he comes crying out to the Lord to blot out, wash away, and cleanse him.

Prayer can be hard at times. And you can wonder, is God ever hearing my prayers? Well, you know, if you make this prayer, if you can see your sin and your need for Jesus and you ask for forgiveness, then I can guarantee that he will answer that prayer.

You will be forgiven. You will be cleansed. This is where David began, praying to God, about to sin for forgiveness.

This is what many of you have and what some of you can receive right now. There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains.

Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you that we can pray to you to have mercy on us, O God.

[30 : 45] Have mercy on me, O God, we can say ourselves according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy.

O God, we pray that you would, through the power of the Holy Spirit, be working in our hearts.

Revive these brothers and sisters here this evening.

Encourage them in their faith. that though our sins, Lord, are many, your mercy is far more.

And may there be any here this evening, Lord. May you open their eyes. May they find rest for their souls in you this evening.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Let us sing this wonderful psalm. That it encourages us also to make this prayer of repentance, to cry out to God for forgiveness.

[32 : 04] Psalm 130 in the Scottish Psalter. It's on page 421. 1. As we began by singing, he took me from the miry clay.

But then he set my feet on a rock. And maybe it's in the miry clay you feel this evening. Well, sing, Lord, from the depths to thee I cried.

My voice, Lord, do thou hear. unto my supplication's voice, give an attentive ear. Let's sing and pray these words in praise to God.

Psalm 130 to his praise. Lord, from the death to thee I cry.

My voice, Lord, do I hear. Unto my supplication's voice, give an attentive ear.

[33 : 36] Lord, we shall stand with thou, O Lord, shed mark any with thee, but yet with thee forgivenesses that fear the may hast thee.

I wait for God, my soul don't wait, my hope is in this word, more than they have one morning watch, my soul always for the Lord, I say more than they had to watch, the morning light to see, let Israel open learn the Lord, both and mercy and mercy sea And plentious redemption Is ever found with him And from all his iniquities The good's will shall redeem

Now may grace, mercy and peace From God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit Rest and remain with each of you Both now and forever Amen