

A Repentant Heart

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
(Psalm 51:1)*

In 2 Samuel 13 the prophet Nathan, sent by the Lord, confronts David over his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah the Hittite. Upon hearing Nathan's words, David's heart was convicted and knew himself unjustifiably guilty. He was faced squarely with his own sins, and the knowledge that not only did Nathan know about them, but so did the Lord. His sin was uncovered, no longer hidden in the depths of his own soul, but brought out into the light of day by Nathan's parable. David didn't deny or attempt to justify his actions, he confessed them. David finally came to a point where he could come before the Lord seeking His forgiveness, His grace. David's past experiences in his relationship with the Lord assured him that he could humble himself with a repentant heart before the Lord and receive that forgiveness. This is where the Lord's grace first kicks in: in that past experience that teaches us that no matter what we have done we can still come back to him. David fully understands the magnitude of his sin.

David has been suffering the effects of his sins for over a year. It is hard to imagine that his conscience didn't haunt him in the middle of the night, or constrict his heart at the mention of Uriah or at the sight of Bathsheba – if he ever called her to him during this time. Psalm 32 is a penitential psalm written by David. It is not known exactly when he wrote it; but, clearly by its heartfelt description of the unbearable weight of living with unrepentant sin we can surmise it was based upon a time when David harbored a deep dark secret that ate away at his soul. In verses 3-5 he wrote:

*When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night
your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was sapped
as in the heat of summer.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.*

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*I said, "I will confess
my transgressions to the LORD"--
and you forgave
the guilt of my sin.*

According to Torah David did two things that demanded the death penalty. He committed adultery and he murdered Uriah. Both of these sins were a capital offense according to the law and according to the Law David was a dead man. I believe he truly recognized his sin for what it was, and that he was truly repentant. Notice how David addresses the Lord. He calls upon the Lord's mercy, love and compassion in Psalm 51:1:

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.*

Recall Exodus 34:6-7 says, *"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."* David knows better than anyone the character of the Lord. Gracious can be equated with love. David throws himself before the Lord claiming the truth of who the Lord is by the Lord's own words. He knows that the Lord prefers to deal with his children in love and compassion rather than righteous judgment. The prophet Micah describes the Lord in similar terms regarding his dealings with the nation of Israel when they have pursued other gods.

*Who is a God like you,
who pardons sin and forgives the transgression
of the remnant of his inheritance?
You do not stay angry forever
but delight to show mercy.*

*You will again have compassion on us;
you will tread our sins underfoot
and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.
(Micah 7:18-19)*

David knows that he is deserving of righteous judgment, he writes in Psalm 51:14: *"Save me from bloodguilt".* David had shed innocent blood that screamed out from the earth for justice, for his blood to be spilt in atonement. In his repentance he begs the Lord to

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"cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean" (v. 7). The word cleanse in the beginning of this verse means to "purge or purify from uncleanness"¹. The hyssop refers to the blood from the Passover lamb sacrificed to purify the Israelites and prevent the angel of death from passing out judgment against the Israelites on the night of the first Passover. Hyssop was also used in sprinkling the blood of the sacrificed animal upon the ark on the Day of Atonement. The blood of that animal was the sacrifice given to the lord to purify Israel as a nation from their sins once a year. He says in V. 10: *"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."* The Hebrew word *"bara"* means to shape, fashion, create something from nothing, an activity only God can accomplish. As in, creating the heavens and the earth. Man is incapable of this type of creation. It is something only God can do. Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words further explains *"bara"*: *"Though a precisely correct technical term to suggest cosmic, material creation from nothing, bārā' is a rich theological vehicle for communicating the sovereign power of God, who originates and regulates all things to His glory."* Only God can create a new heart in David that will glorify God. We have seen the depravity to which man's heart will fall if not for the Lord's intervention. David had been chosen by the Lord to shepherd Israel in a way that glorifies God. That calling and anointing is not voided by David's failings, but redeemed through his heart felt repentance and recognition that only God can restore him to the man he is to be in God's sight.

In verse 11 David pleads that the Lord will not cast him out of his presence. David had seen what Saul had become through his own unrepentance. He knew with all his heart that Saul had been the Lord's anointed. Do you think he knew that Saul's flagrant disobedience and lack of repentance cost Saul the presence of the Lord? I think David was terrified of this consequence. Because of that fear he knew the only thing that would allow him to remain in the Lord's presence was humble confession and repentance. He acknowledged that atonement sacrifices are insufficient if not accompanied by a truly contrite and repentant heart.

*You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.*

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise.*

(v 16-17)

¹ Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

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In Isaiah 1:11-17 the Lord teaches us that sacrifices made without repentance are an insult to him. It is the attitude of our heart for which the Lord is most concerned.

*"The multitude of your sacrifices--
what are they to me?" says the LORD.
"I have more than enough of burnt offerings,
of rams and the fat of fattened animals;
I have no pleasure
in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.
12 When you come to appear before me,
who has asked this of you,
this trampling of my courts?
13 Stop bringing meaningless offerings!
Your incense is detestable to me.
New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations--
I cannot bear your evil assemblies.
14 Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts
my soul hates.
They have become a burden to me;
I am weary of bearing them.
15 When you spread out your hands in prayer,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even if you offer many prayers,
I will not listen.
Your hands are full of blood;
16 wash and make yourselves clean.
Take your evil deeds
out of my sight!
Stop doing wrong,
17 learn to do right!
Seek justice,
encourage the oppressed.
Defend the cause of the fatherless,
plead the case of the widow.*

The Lord is always seeking to have a relationship with us, his children, his beloved creation. Our sins, our sinful choices are what drive a wedge into that relationship. The atonement sacrifice is the cost of the sin, and there is always a consequence resulting from our sin, but the Lord, throughout time, has set in place a system to cross the chasm of sin between us and him.

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*Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save,
nor his ear too dull to hear.*

*But your iniquities have separated
you from your God;
your sins have hidden his face from you,
so that he will not hear.*

(Isaiah 59:1-2)

Despite David's repentance, despite the Lord's forgiveness, there is still atonement to be made in the form of the death of David's son (Do you see a foreshadowing of the death of another beloved son for the reparation of sin?), and there are still consequences of that sin that will ripple through the rest of David's life. Turn to 2 Samuel 12: 10-12. The consequences outlined here are not wrathful punishment on the part of the Lord, but are the natural consequences of David's sin. Punishment is the natural consequence of sin, and in David's case it is four-fold, paralleling the four-fold restitution David required of the man in Nathan's parable in 2 Samuel 12:6 following the Torah requirement for stealing a sheep in Exodus 22:1. While David required the man to pay back the value of a lamb, God required that restitution in kind. There would be four deaths in David's family as a direct result of his sin, and there were four judgments uttered by Nathan against David's house.

1. V10: *Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'*
2. V 11: *'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you.*
3. V 11-12: *Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight.¹² You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'*"
4. V 14: *"the son born to you will surely die"*

Just because we repent and are forgiven does not mean the Lord will fix the consequences of our disobedience. We will be seeing David living out these consequences throughout the rest of his life. Amazingly he faces them head on without murmuring or cries of injustice. In our next week's homework will see David weather the storm of the whirlwind of his own sowing. It will be a difficult week of homework, a dark and heart-breaking time in his life.