

Telling the Truth to God

The Singer, Part 15

Psalm 51

According to Time Magazine, in 1970 Katherine Power, a university student in Boston, was a leader of a radical National Student Strike Force. She and several others planned to raise money to buy arms for the Black Panthers by robbing a bank.

Kathy actually drove the getaway car. But the robbery went south as a silent alarm was quickly answered by a nearby policeman. Shots were fired and the policeman was killed in the gunfight.

The students fled in their car as Kathy drove behind the wheel. That night Kathy began what would become 23 years of life in hiding. She would be listed as armed and very dangerous, her picture posted as one of the FBI's most wanted.

Kathy moved as far away as she could, settling down in Oregon and changing her name and identity to Alice Metzinger. She started a different life, opened a restaurant, bought a house, got married and had a child. She was an active part of her community and seemingly every reason to be everything she said she was.

But 23 years later, she was riddled with secret fear, desperately physically tired, inwardly tormented by guilt and chronically depressed. Finally, she did the only thing she could think of to try and end her agony. To the utter shock of her family, friends, clients and neighbors, she turned herself in to the authorities and revealed that she wasn't Alice Metzinger after all, but Katherine Power.

Newspapers reported her ultimate motive for finally telling the truth – she said, “I was tired of living with shame and hiddenness . . . and guilt.” It was time to face up to the truth.¹

Probably one of the most famous Psalms in David's collection is *Psalm 51* – where I want you to turn today.

It's nothing less than David dealing being brought out of hiding . . . dealing with his sin – it's his private journal entry that would become one of the most famous songs in Israel – famous because everyone can identify with the lyrics – it's for us all to sing – it's the song of someone who finally told the truth to God.

I found it interesting that it was *Psalm 51* which famous historical figures wanted associated with their dying breath.

For what better dying breath could you have than one of honest confession to God?

Sir Thomas More and Lady Jane Grey recited this Psalm as they were led to the scaffold during the bloody days of Henry VIII; King Henry V had it read to him as he lay on his deathbed. William Carey, the great pioneer missionary to India, asked that this Psalm be used as the text of his funeral sermon.ⁱⁱ

Now, you'll notice in your text the historical superscription that appears just above *verse 1* informs us that this poem had been written by David after Nathan's courageously declared to David that his year of hiding was effectively over.

David then wrote this hymn of true confession and handed it over to the choirmaster of Israel to teach the choir and the congregation to sing.

This text is no doubt the greatest expose of genuine confession that you'll find anywhere in scripture.

David also has become physically exhausted, depressed and spiritually broken, according to *Psalm*

32. His secret life – his secret sins – had brought his heart and life to despair and ruin.

But now the truth was out and David wasn't hiding anymore – so this song has outbursts of weeping but also of hope and trust and faith.

Now, I got to tell you, as I prepared to work through this Psalm with you, I realized that it would take numerous studies to uncover it all.

In fact, I came across a statement by Charles Spurgeon, the wonderful expositor pastor of England in the 1800's, wrote that he had attempted on several occasions to write his commentary on this Psalm but gave up several times – it was just too much – – so personal and deep – he wrote, “too freighted with divine truth.” He finally wrote his commentary but added, “To try and comment on this Psalm – ah! Where is he who having attempted it can do none other than blush at his defeat?”ⁱⁱⁱ

Well, with that encouraging word, let's begin.

And let me give you 5 key words to serve as the barest of outlines – and we'll track through only some of this Psalm according to these 5 words.

1. The first word is Petition covering verses 1 and 2.

David writes in *verse 1*, ***Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy.***

In other words, David approaches God on the basis of covenant love saturated and invited by mercy.

Grace is when God gives you what you *don't* deserve; Mercy is when God *doesn't* give you what you *do* deserve.

David is guilty of lust, deception, adultery, conspiracy to murder, hypocrisy, lying, abuse of power, and on and on.

He had tried to cover his tracks and only dug the pit deeper still.^{iv}

David realizes that apart from God's mercy, he doesn't stand a chance. He's not asking God for what he deserves.

But he dares to ask this: notice the first three requests bound up in this petition.

- First, ***blot out my transgressions***
- Secondly, ***wash me thoroughly from my iniquities***
- Thirdly, ***Cleanse me from my sin***

Blot out is a verb that referred to erasing the lines in a ledger. David is praying, “Lord – erase the record of my sin.”

Wash me is a verb that can refer to laundering dirty clothing. “Lord, clean off the stains from the garments of my life.”

Thirdly, ***cleanse me*** is a verb where David is clearly not just talking about some stains on his clothes or some mistakes in his private diary – no, his very person needs cleansing.

Remember, he's been caught red handed. His hands and his heart are stained deep red.

There's another categorical word in our outline.

2. David makes a petition . . . but, secondly, he's also making an admission.

In fact, you might circle the many times he uses personal pronouns – beginning back in *verse 1*. ***Have mercy on ME . . . blot out MY transgressions . . . verse 2. Wash ME thoroughly from MY iniquity, and cleanse ME from MY sin. Verse 3. For I know My transgressions, and MY sin is ever before Me.***

Have you noticed how people who've been arrested and accused of wrongdoing – perhaps being taken into police custody or into a courtroom – they will often pull their jacket up over their head – or try to shield their face from the camera.^v

They don't want to be seen . . . they don't want to be identified or tied to their crimes.

David is effectively pulling away his jacket. He's putting down his hand – he's literally turning his face toward the penetrating, holy, gaze of God and admitting – “This is my sin . . . I did it . . . it's me!”

Listen, someone who hopes to be forgiven isn't going to go to God and say:

- Lord, *You* know how I am!
- *You* know my personality . . .
- You know what my *childhood* was like . . .
- *You* know my parents . . .
- *You* know about my low paying job and my terrible working conditions . . .
- *You* know about all those people that work around me
- Lord, all that stuff made me sin!”

That person isn't confessing anything – in fact, he not only is excusing himself, he's actually making God take the blame –

- You gave me my family!
- You gave me my job!
- You made me this way!
- Look at what *You* made me do!

David is doing the exact opposite . . . he isn't blaming his heredity; his personality; his society; some disability.^{vi}

Notice *verse 3 again: These are my transgressions*: that word for transgression refers to someone crossing a forbidden boundary – going into forbidden territory.

We use the expression, "Crossing the line."

David admits he crossed the line.

Have you done that lately? With your words or your actions or your thoughts . . . you crossed the line!

David goes on to admit – this is, *verse 3b, my sin which is ever before me*.

The word he uses for *sin* is *chattath* which means to fall short of the standard, or, to miss the mark – like an arrow in David's day that either fell short of the target or completely missed it.^{vii}

David is effectively saying, "I missed the mark – I went way off target."

Listen, the first steps toward forgiveness include admission . . . saying what people in our world can never bring themselves to say – "I did that and it was actually *wrong*."

David then admits that his sin was ultimately and uniquely sinning against the holy character of God. Petition . . . Admission

3. David now addressed the concept of the origin of sin – that's the third key word for your outline - Origin.

Notice verse 5. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Now David isn't condemning his parents or implying that his parents were involved in something sinful or that David was conceived by his mother out of wedlock.

That's not what he's saying. He's addressing the issue of original sin. He's not only saying, "I sinned" but "I am a sinner."

One author wrote that David here is actually laying on himself the blame of a corrupted nature instead of just a few corrupted acts of sin.^{viii}

David says, "The real problem here is me!"

Again, this runs contrary to much of the kind of confession we hear today, doesn't it? Perhaps what we hear coming from our own lips:

- I did something wrong, but that wasn't really me;
- I know I killed that man, but that wasn't me holding the knife;
- I know I did something bad, but I'm really a good person.
- That just wasn't like me.

David actually says, "What I *did* actually revealed what I truly *am*."

And that's genuine confession.

Every time we sin, we are proving that we truly inherited Adam's sinful nature (*Romans 5:19*).

Even the Apostle Paul would admit, "I know that in my dwells no good thing."

Whatever good we do is because we allow the Spirit of God to work through us. Whatever bad we do that all by ourselves – we don't need any help.

And that's why there are millions of laws reinforcing 10 commandments – because we are corrupt and clever enough to find whatever possible loophole there might be.

The law simply reveals our guilty nature.

Have you ever been driving down the interstate and passed a Highway Patrol car and instinctively put on your brakes.

Why?

Because you're a sinner . . . I mean, because *we* are sinners.

I was at the Cary Post Office this past week and driving back up Kildaire Farm Road I was reminded that they had changed the speed limit from 45 miles an hour to 35 miles an hour a few years ago. Which is ridiculous . . . Kildaire Farm road is a four lane highway . . . 45 was already dangerously slow.

When I first saw the new speed limit signs – do you think I said to myself, "Well that's just great – I now have brand new opportunities to submit to the Holy Spirit!"

No . . . I immediately thought, "Hey, since I lived here before they changed the speed limit, I wonder if they'd grandfather me in."

My wife and I were among the first to move into a neighborhood many years ago. We built on an acre lot that eventually became part of a cul-de-sac. It's in a county jurisdiction – which means we don't really know what town we belong to.

If you were to ask me for directions to our house, I would tell you to turn right just past two barn silos

. . . go a mile and turn into our subdivision. Then take that road all the way to a dead end and turn right; then take that road all the way to a dead end and take another right – then 100 feet or so and you’re in our driveway . . . simple as that.

In the early days I could come to those dead ends and just turn the corner and keep up my momentum. And then one day – one dark and terrible day – I came home from work and they had put up two stop signs; one at each dead end.

Dead end . . . what an absolute waste of money . . .

We don’t need them . . . why were they put there?

I’ll tell you why – those stop signs were put there as messengers from Satan to buffet me.

Now I’ve got even one more decision to make in my spiritual life.

David never says here, “The problem was Bathsheba’s beauty; or availability; or Uriah’s loyalty or even his own lethargy or Nathan’s brutal honesty.”

David said, “The problem is all mine.”

Not only have I sinned, but I am in my very nature a sinner. Spurgeon wrote, the fountain of my life is polluted as well as its many streams.^{ix}

The problem isn’t the stop signs . . . or speed limits . . . or any law. The problem is stubbornness . . . and self-will . . . and pride . . . and a sinful corrupt nature that is merely revealed as the law appears; and we, like the Apostle Paul, long to be forever rid of that body of death – that sinful self – when we in our glorified eternal bodies enjoy Christ without any selfish interruption or sinful obstruction.

Won’t that be glorious.?

In the meantime . . . let’s learn how to confess our sins to God through Christ our mediator.

Petition . . . Admission . . . Origin

4. The fourth word is Restoration

Let me highlight two phrases for the sake of time.

The first is in *verse 7 – Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean.*

David is directing us toward the priestly practice of blood sacrifices in the temple.

Hyssop was a small plant often found growing in the crevices of rock and even stone walls. Because of its shape and structure, it was used as a small brush. And in the ceremonies of the temple, it was dipped in blood and used to sprinkle the blood.^x

In fact, it is mentioned for the first time at the Passover when the Israelites were leaving Egypt. God through Moses commanded them to *take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood of the lamb and brush it on the doorposts (Exodus 12:22).*

David is actually asking God to act as Priest and sprinkle his heart and mind and life with the blood of an innocent sacrifice.

David is making this profound statement here – nothing but blood can take away blood stains. Only the most powerful purification can purify a sinner.^{xi}

And Christ is powerful indeed!

What that means, is that David is speaking personally, yet prophetically of that coming day when the final atoning blood of Jesus Christ will be shed for the complete and final payment of sin and guilt.

The Apostle Peter wrote that *Jesus Christ bore in His own body on the tree our sins, that we being dead to sin – that is, no longer bound to the penalty of sin – can live lives that are right with God (I Peter 2:24)*

The writer of Hebrews would say it this way: *Since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience (Hebrews 10:21-22).*

That’s tabernacle/temple terminology.

And David doesn’t just want pardon – he wants purity. He wants to have a clean conscience having been forgiven.

He goes even further . . . not only does he want to be purged, he wants to be renewed.^{xii}

Notice the second phrase in *verse 10 – Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*

This is really incredible language – and truth here.

David chooses the verb *bara* – which is the same word used in Genesis chapter 1 where God created the heavens and the earth. It’s a verb that refers to creating, not out of existing material, but out of nothing.

Which is why we call creation a miracle, right?

The heavens and the earth weren’t the result of the explosion of existing gasses . . . earth wasn’t formed over time by dust over billions of years . . . “out of nothing, God created the heavens and the earth.”

The verb appears in Genesis chapter 1 again in reference to the creation of self-conscious life – the

animal kingdom. Again, creation of species out of nothing but His creative imagination and power and will.

Then the verb appears in reference to the creation of self-conscious and God-conscious life – Adam and Eve.^{xiii}

So get the wonderfully encouraging implication here. When David uses the verb *bara* – create in my a clean heart – he’s asking for nothing less than a miracle.

He’s not saying, like we’re tempted to think or say, “Lord, I’ll get my heart into shape and then you take it and make it pure. I’m sure you want me to get my act together and then give you something to work with!”

Oh no . . . Lord, I’ve got nothing pure to offer you – you’re going to have to create a pure heart out of nothing.”

He’s effectively admitting, “Lord . . . this is a creative work that only You can do for me . . . I’ve got nothing to give you . . . I can offer nothing that you would be impressed with.”

This is great theology . . . this is true confession . . . which brings about wonderful restoration.

Petition . . . Admission . . . Origin . . . Restoration

5. The fifth and final word I’ll give you is Resolution

Part of genuine confession is a desire to live for Christ.

Note the word, *Then* in *verse 13*. David says, “Here’s what I want to do now . . . here’s my resolution following restoration.

Then, I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will return to you.

David doesn’t say, “Okay, now that I’m forgiven I’m going to make sure I never hang around sinners ever again . . . I’ll just camp out at the Temple.”

Not quite . . . “Lord . . . let me get involved in the lives of sinful people and teach them what I’ve learned about your mercy and grace and atonement and pardon and forgiveness.”

In fact, I think I’ll write a song about all that I’ve learned and teach it to the congregation.

Here’s one that’s been sung for a generation or two that matches David’s lessons learned.

It goes like this:

*Just as I am without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee
O Lamb of God, I come . . . I come.*

That song works for non-believers who come as guilty sinners by faith to Christ for salvation; it also works for believers who come guilty of specific sins . . . who come by faith to Christ for cleansing.

Listen to another stanza or two:

*Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot
O Lamb of God, I come . . . I come.*

*Just as I am Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come . . . I come.*

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/8/2014 by Stephen Davey.

© Copyright 2014 Stephen Davey
All rights reserved.

i Craig Brian Larson, *750 Engaging Illustrations* (Baker Books, 2007), p. 225

ii James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms: Volume 2* (Baker Books, 1996), p. 424

iii Ibid

iv Donald Williams, *Mastering the Old Testament: Psalms 1-72* (Word Publishing, 1986), p. 362

v Adapted from John Phillips, *Exploring the Psalms: Volume 1* (Loizeaux Brothers, 1988), p. 408

vi Adapted from W. Graham Scroggie, *The Psalms: Volume II* (Pickering & Inglis, 1949), p. 10

vii Boice, p. 426

viii Boice, p. 427

ix C.H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Volume 1* (Zondervan, reprint; 1977), p. 403

x Adapted from Boice, p. 429
xi Spurgeon, p. 403
xii Boice, p. 431
xiii Adapted from Boice, p. 432