

I. INTRODUCTION

- a. A great number of psalms within the 150 recorded in the Bible
 - i. Psalms of thanksgiving
 - ii. Psalms of lament
 - iii. Imprecatory psalms – calling for God’s judgment on enemies
- b. Psalm 51
 - i. It is a penitential psalm
 - 1. Psalm of repentance
 - 2. Seven of them in total in the scriptures
 - 3. 51 is by far the most famous one
 - 4. 51 is the most oft-used during worship or devotion throughout church history
 - ii. It is a model of confession, repentance, and restoration
 - 1. Attributed to David
 - 2. Also representative of humanity
 - a. Realization of sin
 - b. Standing before a holy and righteous judge
 - iii. The psalm is broken into three components
 - 1. The problem of sin
 - 2. The solution to sin
 - 3. The restoration from sin

II. THE PROBLEM WITHIN US (vv.1-5)

- a. The background to this psalm being written (2 Sam. 11-12)
- b. The psalmist demonstrates he knows his plight (1-3)
 - i. He appeals to God’s *chesed*
 - 1. God’s loving kindness or steadfast love
 - 2. This is the attribute from which mercy flows

- ii. He prays for a multiplied washing
 - 1. Hebrew idiom alluding to a deep stain that needs multiple washes to remove
 - 2. Similar to a white garment
 - a. TV Commercials of wine on a white carpet
 - b. White sports uniforms
 - c. No matter how many washes, it's never truly cleaned
 - 3. Now imagine YOU are the garment, and sin is the stain!
- c. Terrifying feeling to be confronted with the reality of our sin
 - i. There is no place we can go to avoid it
 - ii. There is nothing we can do to justify ourselves
 - iii. We can only throw ourselves on the *chesed* of God in heaven
 - iv. Only God can wash us clean
- d. The doctrine of sin
 - i. Sinning against God alone doesn't sound right
 - 1. Whether David sinned toward Bathsheba is debated
 - 2. Whether David sinned toward Uriah is not in dispute
 - a. He sinned toward Uriah on at least three levels
 - i. He took Uriah's wife
 - ii. He sought to deceive Uriah
 - iii. He had Uriah killed
 - b. He sinned toward his own men in ordering Uriah's death
 - ii. His response to being confronted is "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam. 12:13)
 - 1. A human doesn't get to determine moral standards
 - a. We do that through municipal laws (with limited effect)
 - i. If I run a red light on the way home and get into an accident, what did I violate?

ii. The police won't tell me I did something against the person I crashed into

iii. The police will tell me I did something against the *law*

b. In human terms, the laws of Annapolis, Anne Arundel County, Maryland, United States set the standards by which we must behave

2. God sets the standard

a. The law of God dictates moral behavior

b. Because of this, any action contrary to God's law is an act against God

c. Those on the other end are secondary victims of our actions

d. Sins we commit may be *toward* someone else, but they are ultimately *against* God

3. Acknowledging this, and admitting God's judgment is just, is the pivotal step in repentance

iii. Verse 5 is similarly tough to unpack

1. This is not speaking of David being born out of wedlock, as our western definition of "conceived in sin" might suggest

2. This is underlining the doctrine of total, or complete, depravity

a. This is a difficult truth to hear, especially in our day

b. Every human being in existence is born into sin

i. Sin is ingrained into the very fiber of our existence

ii. Sin is passed down from one generation to the next, without fail

iii. Who taught you how to sin?

1. It wasn't our parents

2. Quite the opposite, especially if you grew up in a Christian home!

3. We worked it out on our own from a young age
 4. It comes to us naturally because it is woven into the very fabric of our humanity
- c. If this is the man after God's own heart, what chance do we have?
- iv. If that were the entirety of the psalm, it would be the most depressing words ever written
1. If that's all there is, then let's eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die
 2. Thanks be to God that's not the end!
 3. We are not left with only the reality of the depth and misery of sin
 4. The Holy Spirit points David to look to the solution, and through him beckons us to do the same

III. THE SOLUTION OUTSIDE OF US (vv.6-12)

- a. Verse 6 begins with a parallelism to v. 5
 - i. "I was brought forth in iniquity" vs "you delight in truth"
 - ii. "In sin did my mother conceive me" vs "you teach me wisdom"
- b. Verse 5 reinforces that sin is the problem
- c. Verse 6 puts God at odds with the problem
 - i. He delights in truth
 - ii. He teaches sinners wisdom that comes only from him
- d. Vv. 7-12 are some of the most famous penitential verses in Scripture
 - i. Each asks God to impute something upon the sinner
 1. This is not an ask to be relieved from consequences
 - a. As with the confession, David's eyes are not on the temporal
 - i. We know he prayed for the infant until he died

- ii. But this was not the priority of David's relationship with God
 - b. The consequences God promised did come to pass
 - i. Public disgrace for David's private indiscretion, brought about through Absalom
 - ii. The death of the child conceived in this deceitful liaison
 - c. David was not spared from consequences, but it did not change his posture
 - 2. As sinners we must not be preoccupied with our circumstances
 - a. Every choice we make, good or evil, has consequences
 - b. We must be prepared to face those
 - c. At the same time, the chief concern is ultimately forgiveness of our sins
- ii. Hyssop in Verse 7
- 1. Qualities
 - a. Hyssop was an herb in the mint family
 - b. It carried many medicinal and cleansing qualities
 - c. It was common in the Ancient Near East
 - 2. Uses in scripture
 - a. Purification (Lev. 14:1-7, 33-53)
 - b. Painting the doorposts at Passover (Ex. 12:22)
 - c. Putting the sponge to Christ's lips (John 19:28-30)
 - d. Purging (figuratively) in order to cleanse (51:7)
- iii. Familial feelings in vv.8-9
- 1. Joy and gladness are intimate feelings
 - 2. He seeks the words of God
 - a. "Good tidings of great joy"

- b. The assurance of sin being forgiven
3. Broken bones?
- a. Not literal breaking
 - b. Figurative statement of brokenness toward sin
 - i. “Shook” is the modern word
 - ii. Distressed to the point of breaking
 - c. In that brokenness he seeks comfort and rejoicing
 - i. Assurance that God will forgive
 - ii. Not that God will look the other way and let him continue sinning
 - 1. “God loves you just the way you are”
 - 2. More precisely, “God loves you *in spite of* the way you are.”
 - 3. Vv. 10-12 demonstrate this.
4. 10-12 a common refrain sung in churches
- a. This keeps in step with those who have gone before us
 - b. It is all God’s action, and man’s reception
 - i. God creates a clean heart “in me”
 - ii. God renews a right spirit “within me”
 - iii. God does not cast away “me”
 - iv. God does not take the holy spirit away “from me”
 - v. God restores the joy of his salvation “to me”
 - vi. God will uphold a willing spirit “within me”
 - c. All of these actions are brought by God to those who are keenly aware of their need
 - i. Forgiveness
 - ii. Redemption
 - iii. Regeneration

iv. Imputation of grace and righteousness

IV. THE REDEMPTION OFFERED TO US (vv.13-19)

- a. Because God has forgiven us, we are now in position to tell others about what he has done for us
- b. This is not a conditional statement, as if David is cutting a deal
- c. This is the logical outflow of what God has done
 - i. Because he is forgiven, he can tell everyone about the greatness of God
 - ii. Because his heart and lips are opened, he can share that truth with others
 - iii. Because of his confession from sin and forgiveness from sin, David can teach others about the gravity of sin and the greatness of the one who forgives
- d. No amount of “doing” is going to accomplish that
 - i. If it were possible, he could have just offered sacrifices
 - ii. Sacrifices were never the point!
 - 1. The point was to show the people how violent and messy sin was
 - 2. The point was to point them toward the God who could really forgive them; no bull, lamb or dove could cover their sins
 - iii. The proper posture toward God is a broken spirit
 - 1. Someone who is broken over sin
 - 2. Someone who understands the depth and misery of sin
 - 3. Someone who recognizes the solution to sin doesn't come from within, but from outside themselves
- e. God will build up his people and be good to them
 - i. Some discussion about the place of vv. 18-19 in this passage
 - 1. Insertion by Isaiah in light of the exile?
 - 2. David's looking forward to the building of the Temple?
 - a. This seems to fit with the rest of the passage
 - b. Sacrifices in the temple a difficulty

- i. Hence the distinction between accepted and undesired sacrifices
- ii. A means of preparing God's people for what was to come
- c. Perhaps David's forward-looking to the time of Messiah, the culmination of Israel and of the line of David

V. APPLYING THE WORD

- a. Do I realize the depth and pervasiveness of sin in my life?
 - i. If not, please talk to one of the elders afterward, because this is the most important conversation you'll ever have!
 - ii. If you do, then have you confessed this before God?
- b. Do I understand that, even though I sin toward other people, all sin is ultimately against God?
- c. In what ways do I recognize the need for God's cleansing in my life, and the greatness of God in cleansing me from sin?