

## Psalm 51

### Dirty David Comes Clean

#### Introduction: David's Dirty Deed

The heading of this psalm states: "*For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.*"

Leaders are notoriously bad at controlling sexual desire. George Washington, Presidents Jackson, Buchanan, Cleveland, Wilson, Harding, Franklin D Roosevelt, Eisenhower, JFK, Johnson, Bill Clinton - what a collection of womanizers, mistress collectors, fathers of illegitimate children, prostitute chasers, sex addicts! George Washington had a mistress. Thomas Jefferson had several children with his black slave. Woodrow Wilson committed adultery with Mary Hulbert Peck, who divorced her husband. Warren Harding had an affair with a friend's wife and regularly made love to Nan Britton, 30 years his junior, in a White House broom cupboard. Franklin Roosevelt had affairs with his secretary, 'Missy' Le Hand and also with Crown Princess Marta of Norway. Dwight Eisenhower had an illicit love affair with his driver, Kay Summersby. JFK's had sex with film stars Marilyn Monroe and Angie Dickinson, a stripper 'Blaze' Starr and Judith Exner Campbell, who was also the mistress of a Chicago mobster.

Christian leaders are also especially vulnerable to sexual temptation. Anglicare used to have its offices in St. Andrew's House. Only a few years back a former Director left in disgrace, deserting his wife of many years and running off with his secretary. There were times when the door to his office was locked and he was in there alone with his secretary. Pray the Lord will keep our church leaders sexually pure.

#### Disaster Dazes Dirty David

Most sexually immoral political leaders stay in office. There might be a stink, but the Bill Clintons of this world weather the storm and survive. The Australian public has largely turned a blind eye to the sexual immorality of its Prime Ministers. John Gorton admitted to cheating on his wife on a number of occasions. On March 21, 1989, Bob Hawke, who had been voted "Father of the Year" in 1987, wept in a TV interview, as he confessed to engaging in extra-marital affairs. But there was no real scandal and, wonder of wonders, he was even declared "Australian of the Year" in 1992. Indeed, JFK was admired by many for his sexual prowess. But David's situation was different, as indicated by the way in which the psalm begins: "*When the prophet Nathan came to him.*"

God sent Nathan to drive home to David the evil of what he had done. The text says literally: "*Nathan came into David.*" The verb "came into" is precisely the same one used back in 2 Samuel 11 describing how David "came into" Bathsheba when he had sexual intercourse with her. The sending of Nathan was God's precisely ordered answer to his act of adultery. When Nathan comes to David, David realises he is in very big trouble. The prophets are not only king-makers. They are also king-breakers. David knew he was in danger of losing his position as king and of losing his kingdom. So, in verse 11 he cries out, "*Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.*" Every Christian experiences the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. But in the Old Testament only prophets and kings had the Holy Spirit within them. In verse 11 David

is praying as the king. He remembers what happened to his predecessor, Saul. God sent the prophet Samuel to Saul and the Holy Spirit left Saul. Saul was cast out of God's presence and died a humiliating death. David, like Saul, deserved to be cast out of God's presence, to be deprived of the Holy Spirit, to be removed as king in divine judgment.

See also how the psalm ends: "*In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar*" (vv18-19). David's sin has caused immense damage to the kingdom of God, to Jerusalem. It is as though the walls of Jerusalem have crumbled. Because of David's sin Jerusalem lost its divine protection. Not only must David's sin be forgiven, but Jerusalem must be secured. Until David's sin has been forgiven all of the sacrifices continually offered up by the priests in are a complete waste. They have no influence on God whatsoever. Only God's forgiveness could save David and Jerusalem.

Have you committed a serious sexual sin? Or does some other sin gnaw away at your guts? Unless you experience God's forgiveness you will be cast out of God's presence and your empire will crumble. All you have ever worked for will be taken away from you. If your sin is unforgiven then it doesn't matter how many sacrifices you offer up, it doesn't matter how religious you are, how many good and fine things you do - it is all an utter waste of time and effort. You can spend your life building up the walls. You can use marble if you like. You can make the walls a kilometre thick if you like. But you might as well be building sand castles that will be swept away by the next tide. Because if God is against you there is no wall that will keep him out. All the effort you expend on building a secure life for yourself is an utter waste - unless you know God's forgiveness.

### **Desperation Drives Dirty David**

It is a desperate man who begins by crying out: "*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love.*" 2 Samuel 7 reminds us that God entered into a special arrangement with David. According to this agreement, or covenant, God promised to raise up one of David's offspring to rule an eternal kingdom. In Psalm 51, when David speaks of God's unfailing love he uses a special word, *hesed*, which means God's unflinching commitment to his covenant. The love of God is all about God acting faithfully and honouring his promises. Desperate David calls on God to remember the promises he has made.

What's your approach? "Have mercy on me because I'm a basically decent person. I've done some wrong things, but nobody's perfect. I'm not a bad person. There are plenty of people who have done far worse things than me." Never pray with this mentality. Understand that God is a merciful God and that he is committed to forgiving you because of the covenant he has made with you through Christ. As John says, "*If any Christian sins, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the sacrifice for our sins that turns away God's anger*" (1 Jn 2:1b, 2a).

There's a Spanish story of a father and son who had become estranged. The son ran away, and the father set off to find him. He searched for months to no avail. Finally, in a last desperate effort to find him, the father put an ad in a Madrid newspaper. The

ad read: Dear Paco, meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your Father. On Saturday 800 Pacos showed up, looking for forgiveness and love from their fathers. There are many, many people out there who long to receive God's forgiveness. Are you one of them?

David also asks God to have mercy on him "*according to your great compassion.*" God is not a wimp like some fathers. Some kids really cross the line with their insolence even to the point of insulting their parents. Yet some fathers don't want to rock the boat and let the kids do what they want. David knows God is not like this. He knows he is in danger of losing his rule. Yet he also knows that God is compassionate. God does not excuse your sin, but he does understand your weakness and he sees the depth of your distress.

### Disgust Demoralises Dirty David

Look at yourself in the mirror of God's Word. What do you see? David reels with disgust at the repulsive ugliness he sees in the mirror. David sees himself as a bankrupt, so he prays "*blot out my transgressions*", that is, erase the debt. He sees himself as a filthy man, so he prays, "*Wash away all my iniquity.*" He doesn't ask to be gently swished about in a modern washing machine. In the ancient world and many Third World countries, wet clothes are smashed against rocks to get the ingrained grime out. David wants to be thoroughly clean whatever pain is involved.

A vacuum cleaner salesman gave us a home demonstration. He got me to vacuum thoroughly portions of our carpet. Then he went over the same spots with his super-duper vacuum cleaner and it really was disturbing to see how much more dirt and dust was still buried in the carpet pile. But we were not prepared to pay \$5000 for his super-duper vacuum cleaner so we live with dirt and dust in our carpet. What cost are you prepared to pay to be thoroughly clean?

David sees himself as a diseased person, unfit to mix with God's people or have anything to do with God, so he prays "*cleanse me from my sin*", meaning he wants God to act like the Old Testament priest who examines the leper and declares him to be clean because the leprosy has gone. He sees himself as unable to escape from what he has done, so he acknowledges, "*For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.*" He sees himself as a guilty criminal standing before a righteous judge who doesn't have a leg to stand on, so he recognises, "*Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.*" He sees himself as someone who has always been grotesquely deformed, an Elephant man, morally speaking, so he sighs, "*Surely I was misshapen from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*" Cobras spit poison, sinners sin. We are not sinners because we sin, rather we sin because we are sinners. David sees himself as riddled with deception, so he realises, "*Surely you desire truth in the inner parts.*" He sees himself as a fool who has not merely acted like an idiot but has stupidity woven into the innermost places of his heart, so he declares, "*you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.*"

Are you living with unforgiven sin? If so, you are bankrupt, filthy, diseased, trapped, condemned, deformed, deceived, a fool. David's disgust with himself left him with a broken, contrite spirit. Does sin against God break your heart?

### Dedication Delights Dirty David

Augustine said, "The confession of evil works is the first beginning of good works." David longs to know he is clean in God's eyes, so he prays, "*Cleanse me with hyssop [like a priest ritually cleanses a leper] and I will be clean.*" He longs to be able to look at himself in the mirror and not see a dirty man staring back at him, so he prays, "*wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*" David's sin has made an absolute misery of his life, so he cries out, "*Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.*"

A burglar broke into a house one night. He shone his torch around looking for valuables.

When he picked up a CD player to place in his sack, a strange disembodied voice echoed from the dark, saying, 'Jesus is watching you.' He nearly jumped out of his skin, clicked his flashlight off and froze. When he heard nothing more after a little while, he shook his head, promised himself a holiday after the next score, and then clicked his light back on and began searching for more valuables. Just as he pulled the stereo out so he could disconnect the wires, clear as a bell, he heard, 'Jesus is watching you.' Freaked out, he shone his light around frantically looking for the source of the voice. Finally, in the corner of the room, his torch came to rest on a parrot.

'Did you say that?' he hissed at the parrot.

'Yep,' the parrot confessed, and then squawked, 'I'm trying to warn you.'

The burglar relaxed. 'Warn me, eh? Who are you?'

'Moses,' replied the parrot.

'Moses?' The burglar laughed. 'What kind of stupid people would name a parrot Moses?' The parrot replied, 'Probably the same people that would name a Rottweiler Jesus.'

Do you realise that Jesus is watching you right now? And he is far more dangerous than a pack of Rotweilers. David squirms as he realises that God's eyes are on him and that his loathsomeness is so apparent to God. So he prays, "*Hide your face from my sins.*" He knows he owes God a debt he can never repay so he pleads, "*blot out all my iniquity.*"

But David is not after a quick fix. He longs to be consistently a man of integrity, a faithful man. So he prays, "*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*" David had lost sight of the wonderful things God had done to save his people and to save him from his enemies. So he prays, "*Restore to me the joy of your salvation.*" But you can't be godly if you don't want to be, so he prays, "*grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*"

David's sin prevented him from pastoring God's people. In verses 13-17 David especially prays as the king, promising that when he is restored: "*Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.*" In other words, "I will perform the role you expect of me as king. I will lead and pastor my people, who are sinners like me, by teaching them how to have a personal relationship with you." David pleads with God, "*Save me from bloodguilt, O God,*" meaning take away from me from the guilt of having shed the blood of an innocent man, Uriah. Then, he promises, "*my tongue will sing of your righteousness*", meaning, "I will tell everyone in Israel that you are indeed a God who always acts rightly, who always honours his commitment to his promises." A forgiven Christian longs to tell others what a great

God God truly is: *"O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise."* But God will only restore David and enable him to minister to God's people if he offers up the only sacrifice that means anything to God in such circumstances. So he observes, *"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."* In other words, David recognises he can't play games with God. God knows his heart. God will not have a bar of any religious formalism or religious manipulation. What God wants to see is that David profoundly and deeply grieves over the sin he has committed; that apart from God's forgiveness and restoration he is a broken, finished man with no future, no hope.