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A Picture of True Repentance

2 Samuel 11; Psalm 32; 51

The capitol is full of successful people. People who have succeeded in their chosen professions and careers. People who have succeeded in winning elections. People who have succeeded in attaining positions of leadership and influence. The life of King David is a warning and a lesson to successful people. He had attained the highest pinnacle of success. Ruling the nation. Military victory over his enemies. Living in luxury and comfort. Promised by God to have a successor rule on his throne forever. Perhaps it is this very success that helped lead him to turn from God and commit the heinous sins of adultery, deception, and murder. Yes, David's life should certainly serve as a warning. But his response to those sins is also an example of how every one of us needs to deal with the sin in our own lives. Indeed, David gives us a picture of true repentance.

Consider David's great success. He had consolidated his rule of the kingdom and gained victory over his enemies. God promised him that his kingdom would endure forever as one of his descendants would sit on his throne. He was living in a grand palace, with all the wealth he might desire. He was certainly blessed by God. Yet it is at this point we see David fall into the vilest of sin – adultery and murder. We find the sordid account in 2 Samuel 11.

As David walked on the roof of his house, he overlooked Bathsheba, a beautiful woman. He inquired about her and found out she was married to Uriah, one of his faithful soldiers who was away at war. Despite this fact he slept with her and soon received the disturbing news she was pregnant. Seeking to cover up his sin, he called Uriah home and tried to get him to spend time with his wife in order to cover up his immorality. Uriah refused, so David intentionally had Uriah killed in battle. David took the widow as his own wife, thinking he had gotten away with his affair and covered up his sin. 2 Samuel 11:27 gives us the chilling words: **"But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the Lord".**

God sent the prophet Nathan to David with a poignant story meant to stir his conscience and make him aware of the heinousness of his sin. Nathan told of two men, one poor man with one little ewe lamb for his prized possession, and a rich man with great flocks and herds. The rich man stole the poor man's lamb to feed a guest. David, with his shepherd background showing through, responded with anger: "Surely this man deserves to die. He must make restitution because he did this thing" (2 Samuel 12:5). Nathan powerfully brings home the application of the story to David – **"You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. ⁸I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that**

had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these! ⁹Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight?" (2 Samuel 12:7-9) Nathan then informs David of the severe consequences of his sin. David's response is immediate – **"I have sinned against the Lord".** Nathan replies with some comforting words – **"The Lord has taken away your sin; you shall not die".**

There is more depth in David's confession "I have sinned against the Lord" than we might grasp at first glance. We find this in the confession David wrote concerning these events in Psalm 51. We can see the result of this confession in Psalm 32. In Psalm 51 we see repentance and confession of sin and a plea for forgiveness. In Psalm 32 we see the peace and joy that comes from knowing that God has forgiven our sin. (Please take the opportunity to read these two Psalms as you continue with this study.)

David's Repentance and Confession of Sin

We are struck with the power of David's confession in Psalm 51:

³For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge. ⁵Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.

We find in these words an aspect of the Christian faith and life not much talked about today – that of repentance. Repentance is a vital aspect of Christianity, necessary for salvation. The necessity of repentance was Jesus' first message (Mark 1:15) and included in His final words to His disciples (Luke 24:46-47). The word repentance literally means "a change of mind". In the biblical sense it is a change of mind regarding God and regarding sin. J.C. Ryle described repentance as

“...A thorough change of man’s natural heart upon the subject of sin”.¹ Thomas Watson explained it as “...A grace of God’s Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed”.² This is how C.H. Spurgeon described repentance: “Repentance is a discovery of the evil of sin, a mourning that we have committed it, a resolution to forsake it. It is, in fact, a change of mind of a very deep and practical character, which makes the man love what once he hated, and hate what once he loved”.³

In his classic work on repentance, J.C. Ryle made the following observations, certainly things we can see in David’s expression of repentance in the Psalms.

Repentance begins with a knowledge of sin. This really means getting a greater and clearer vision of God and His holiness and what Christ did for us. When we understand this then we begin to see how sinful we are and how dreadful our sin is. We are often quite knowledgeable and ready to point out the sins of others. This is about becoming knowledgeable of our own sin. As with David, God most often uses His Word to bring this knowledge and awareness of sin.

Repentance includes a sorrow for sin. This is sorrow, not for the consequences of our sin but for the fact that we have sinned against God and against Jesus Christ who suffered and died for us. It is the realization that it is our sin that caused Christ to go the cross. One pastor described it this way:

“Yes, we should be weeping. We should be appalled, disgusted, shocked, and grieved in the depths of our hearts over our sin. All our sin is treason against God. Not just the prideful, lying, stealing, and lustful sins but sins of the tongue, sins of anxiousness, sins of bitterness, sins of partiality, sins of complacency, sins of jealousy, sins of impatience, and sins of arrogance. We should grieve over them all.”⁴

Repentance produces confession of sin. This is primarily confession to God although it may involve confession to others if we have sinned against them. This is the confession John described in his first letter: “**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**” (1 John 1:9)

Repentance leads to turning from sin. This is the outward manifestation of the change that has taken place in our mind and heart. We flee sin. We take steps to get rid of sin and protect ourselves from it. It does not mean we are perfect or always successful, but it is our habit and pattern to seek to rid sin from our lives.

Repentance causes a deep hatred for sin. This reflects the change in our thinking and attitude towards sin. We hate it. We hate what it does to the glory and name of Christ. We hate what it does in our own lives and the lives of others.

David’s Prayer for Forgiveness

Now look at David’s desperate prayer for forgiveness and cleansing from his sin:

¹Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. ²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin...

...⁷Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸Make me to hear joy and gladness, let the bones which You have broken rejoice. ⁹Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities.

We know God Answered David’s plea for forgiveness from Nathan’s words, “The Lord has taken away your sin; you shall not die”. How could God forgive David of such dreadful sins? Verse 7 points us to the answer. “Hyssop” refers to the plant the children of Israel used to place the blood of the lamb on the lintels and door posts during the first Passover in Egypt. This pointed to Lamb of God, Jesus Christ who would shed His blood when He suffered and died for our sin on the cross. It is when we repent, as David did, and cry out for forgiveness that God takes away our sin too! David describes the blessing of this forgiveness in Psalm 32: “How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!

² How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity...” (Psalm 32:1-2)

- *David’s sin is a warning for leaders, indeed for all of us to beware of the sin and temptation to which we will be exposed. Let us grow to hate sin, forsake sin, and rid ourselves of sin more every day.*
- **When we fall into sin, let us follow David’s example to repent and seek God’s forgiveness through what Christ has done for us on the cross.**

¹Ryle, J.C. *Repentance*. Kindle Edition. Loc. 32.

² Watson, Thomas (2011-08-25). *The Essential Works Of Thomas Watson* (Kindle Location 5879). GLH Publishing. Kindle Edition.

³Spurgeon, C.H. *Apostolic Exhortation*. Sermon 804.

www.spurgeongems.org.

⁴Mulville, Jared. *We Should Be Weeping*.

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/we-should-be-weeping>

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