

Sermon – Psalm 51

Part of normal growing up means that we learn how to apologise to each other.

Saying sorry is considered a good social skill to have.

The benefits of a good apology mean that we get to acknowledge our mistakes.

Ideally an apology demonstrates empathy, which tells somebody that we understand how we have hurt them.

A good apology also shows the person that we regret our behaviour towards them.

And good apology offers us a solution to avoiding the same problem in the future.

But it seems the social rules in our world may have changed a little over the last few years and we are now seeing the rise of the false apology.

One of the new words that describe the false apology is the word nonpology.

A nonpology is a real favourite with politicians because it is one way they can apologise without admitting any fault.

Donald Trump is the King of nonpologies. There are hundreds of articles which show how good he is at being a bad apology giver.

Some journalist question whether he has given an apology but I think I found one on his twitter account.

Well he does say sorry. See, right there at the start.

In case you are wondering, I also found the reason why he is bad at apologies, it seems that he is never wrong about anything anyway.

As you can see from Donald's efforts a nonpology really works best if it uses words like "if" and "but" and puts the blame back on the person who has been wronged.

The thing about an nonpology is that it is completely meaningless and it costs nothing.

And this is the world we live in, just google “how to give an apology” and you will get twice as many pages coaching you how to give a false apology than pages giving you ways to actually say sorry with sincerity.

So how did we get to this point where we find it so hard to say sorry, that we need to invent ways to say sorry without meaning it?

A number of things have got us to this point, Pride is on top of the list, we just don't like to think that we are wrong about anything.

Then there is the fear we have, that our sorry will be seen as weakness, weakness because sorry requires that we submit ourselves to the other person that we have wronged.

Saying sorry and really meaning it costs us, because it's hard to admit that we are wrong and it's hard to submit to someone else when we realise we are wrong.

This is why the nonpology or false sorry has become so popular.

Now you might be surprised to know that the Old testament reflects this same kind of problem when it comes to people giving false apologies or no apology at all to God after they have done the wrong thing.

Think of Adam and Eve – no sorry, not even a confession of guilt given by Adam, he just blames shifts everything on to Eve, and she shifts the blame on to the serpent.

And the list of non-confessions and poor excuses in place of a sincere sorry or apology for doing the wrong thing continue through the Old Testament.

Fortunately David gives us a glimpse in Psalm 51 of what genuine heartfelt sorry and confession for doing the wrong thing should look like.

Our first bible reading this morning from the book of 2 Samuel gave us the context for David's heartfelt confession that we have in Psalm 51.

To recap the story, David the king of Israel has awoken from his sleep and is walking on his rooftop garden when he sees the beautiful Bathsheba the wife of one his most trusted fighting men, bathing on a nearby rooftop.

David requests that she join him in his palace with the intention of seducing her, the consequence we find out, is that Bathsheba falls pregnant with David's child.

David then tries to cover his adultery by summoning Uriah from the battlefield in the hope that he would sleep with his wife Bathsheba and claim the child as his own.

But David's plan fails when the faithful Uriah refuses to abandon his men who are camped in the open fields.

David in his sinful desperation removes this threat by arranging for Uriah to be thrown into the heat of the battle lines to be killed by Israel's enemies.

This story of David's Adultery, his lies and the murder he commits in 2 Samuel doesn't finish with David being sorrowful or even in him giving a confession of his sin, the story just finishes saying that the thing David had done displeased the Lord.

The confession we expect from David only comes later when Nathan the prophet is sent to give him Gods perspective of the sin he has committed and the inevitable consequences that David must face.

Serious consequences one of which means that the child born to David through Bathsheba dies shortly after birth.

Psalm 51 is David's corresponding confession for the sin he committed against Uriah and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel.

And is broken into 3 important parts, they are.

1. David's confession in verses 1-5
2. His plea for forgiveness in verse 6-12
3. And finally his response in verses 13-19

As we start to break into these 3 parts in Psalm 51, we see David's clear admission of guilt through his confession, he says in verse 1 "have mercy on me O God according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions.

Do you notice that there is no false apology from David in these opening verses, there are no "if's" or "but's", he doesn't say but it wasn't my fault or that she made me do it.

David just owns his sin before God.

He goes further in verse 3 to explain how disturbed he is by his own sin, he says that the sin he has just committed is always before him.

It's like David is haunted by the guilt that he has because of his sin, and let's remember David has just killed one of his most trusted men just because he lusted after his wife.

And his guilt is most likely being compounded by his knowledge of the 10 commandments, 3 of which he has just broken.

Verse 13 You shall not murder.

Verse 14 You shall not commit adultery.

Verse 17 You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour."

The other way David shows us the gravity of his sin is shown in verse 4, David says, against you God, only you have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.

Verse 4 reminds us that our Sin isn't just with those that we have wronged or sinned against, our sin as David reminds us is directed at God as well.

I hope what is very clear to us as we see David's admission of guilt through his confession in Psalm 51 is that even believers like David who clearly love God and rely on him for everything can fall into deep and terrible sin.

And that our sin isn't just against the people we have wronged but also against God.

David has shown us in his confession that we also should fall before God and confess our sin and its not until we open ourselves up to God like this that we will feel the freedom of God's forgiveness.

The second part of Psalm 51 shows David's plea for forgiveness.

David says in verse 7-9 cleanse me with hyssop, wash me whiter than snow, let me hear joy and gladness, let the bones you have crushed rejoice, blot out my iniquity.

David is helpless before God in asking for forgiveness but he still knows that only God has the power to forgive him of his sin. he also knows that God keeps his promises and that he is faithful.

This is what gives David the confidence to stand before God knowing that he is able to make him clean and bring Joy back to his crushed spirit.

David shows this confidence in God when he says, in verse 7
Cleanse me with Hyssop and I will be clean, wash me and I will be whiter than snow.

David's confidence is in the fact that no sin is too big for his God and that's how we also need to come before God, even when we feel our sin is too great, that we have somehow messed up too much God will cleanse us if we are truly repentant.

Then in verses 10-12 we see David's desire for inner renewal and transformation.

Create in me a pure heart, O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me, he says.

David is asking in these verses that he is made new, that he would be changed.

This is the part where David has figured out that the solution to avoiding the same problem of his sin again, is in him being changed from the inside out.

He wants to turn away from his old ways. He wants to be restored to the joy of Gods salvation.

So again, what does David show us in his plea for forgiveness and desire for a renewed heart?

David reminds us of our state before God, that there is nothing that we can possibly do to save ourselves from our Sin.

Our Sin that must be dealt with and only God can forgive and offer us grace and mercy.

What does this means for us?

It means that we can have complete confidence in Gods ability to save us, that regardless of the size or complexity of our sin he can forgive us change our hearts as well.

The last section in the psalm 51 is David's response to the forgiveness he knows he has received from God.

David says his response is that he will now teach sinners Gods way so that they turn back to him. That his tongue will sing of Gods righteousness and that his mouth will declare Gods praise.

This change in attitude in David from mournful sinner to his praising and glorifying God is what we expect to see from a truly repentant person. The overwhelming joy of forgiveness for their sin can't be held in.

What great news from David, that his heart rejoices the fact that our God cleanses and saves.

But how did David get here so fast, he seems to get from pure regret and guilt about his sin to pure joy at being made clean again all within a few verses.

I can't help but think that this has been a long process for David, one which has been painful and hard to bear, a process that must have meant he spent weeks contemplating, mourning his sin and seeking forgiveness from God.

As I said earlier, David's regret didn't come on his own, David didn't see his sin until Nathan the prophet had been sent to show him his sin.

Please turn your bibles to 2 Samuel chapter 12, found on page number .

I'll be reading from verse 1 From verse 1 to verse 7

The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. 2 The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, 3 but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

4 "Now a traveller came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveller who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

5 David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! 6 He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

7 Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!

Here is the message that David needed to hear so that he would understand his own sin, nothing before had convicted David of his sin

It was only when Nathan the prophet came and gave David God's perspective of his sin that we see David's heart moved to show regret and sorrow.

Friends, what Psalm 51 gives us, is a detailed and insightful confession of a believer that has committed great sin.

There will be some parts of his confession that we will all take away for ourselves today as helpful tools for saying sorry next time we have to.

We may even be encouraged to change the way we give apologies to God because of David's example to us.

But what Psalm 51 may not do, is convict us of our own sinfulness to the point that we are called to be repentant.

Over the last few days of putting this sermon together, I realised that it's easy to take for granted that our God forgives us, it's easy to think that our sin has been forgiven just because I accepted Jesus as Lord and saviour 25 years ago.

But God wants us to come to him daily, he wants us to continue to mature through our sin, to become more like Jesus is what he wants for us.

We can't possibly become more like Jesus if we have forgotten why we said sorry in the first place.

We can't be more like Jesus if we are not moved like David was to regret and confess our sin, and do it daily.

What moved David to action and real repentance was hearing the unjust story of one man's sacrifice at the hand of someone else.

He was moved because it touched his heart to hear the story of the weak being sacrificed for the greedy rich man.

So what really moves you to apologize to others and to God for the wrong you have done, at what point does your heart soften so that you truly regret your sin and want to change the way you live.

Is there a sin that you have been mulling over throughout today's sermon. Sin that you desperately want removed and forgiven.

Just like David do you need to be reminded or even maybe for the first time hear the cost of your sin from another perspective.

The actual cost for your sin against God, that it cost the life of a completely innocent man.

When was the last time you visited the Cross of Jesus Christ and reminded yourself of the high price Jesus paid for you at Calvary.

When was the last time you placed your own sin on the list of crimes he had to pay for when he was mocked, judged, beaten and crucified?

The perspective we need to have for the cost of our sin needs to be seen through Jesus Christ and his sacrifice by dying on the cross.

At the start of the passage today, we looked at what the world is offering in the way of apologies.

We saw examples of how people in the world want to find ways to nonpologise and give false sorry's for what they have done wrong.

Whether we are believers or not, we need to know that we will naturally move towards this kind of sorry giving.

We are proud and we don't like to be made weak in the eyes of others and as we have seen with David it is a dangerous place to be.

Our God has turned the apology upside down. Usually forgiveness in our world only comes from people when we manage to bridge the gap with an apology.

But our God bridges the gap long before we even got the chance to sin. He sent his son to die on the cross and in your place and he did it in advance of you asking for forgiveness.

Not only does he do this but he offers it too us without us asking and he says that it is a free gift to us, no more to pay.

Verse 17 says

My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart you, God will not despise.

This is our joyful response to God in what he done for us when he sent his son to die so that we might have life.

Let's come to God like that.

Friends I will be praying a declaration of God's forgiveness, If your heart has been moved to do so as well then why don't you pray these same words with me in your own heart.

Let's Pray