

THE PROPER PLEA FOR MERCY

INTRODUCTION: We've been talking about God's command for us to be holy. To be holy, we need to be *separate from sin*. To be separate from sin, we need to know *what sin is*. But because the subject of sin is so big, we've narrowed it down to focus on *sins in the church*. But since that is *still* a broad subject, we've narrowed it down even further to the *sin of pride* in the church.

Can God's people—those that are born again and have the Holy Spirit living inside of them—have a *heart full of pride*? Yes, they can!

--Pride can be seen in *motive*—doing things for the praise of men!

--Pride can be seen in the way we *react to correction*. Do we get angry and defensive—or are we *thankful* that someone cared enough to approach us about our sin?

--And pride can be seen in our *lack of prayer*. Sometimes we don't pray because we lack faith, but often times we don't pray because we are *too proud to see our needs*. Like the Laodiceans in Revelation 3, we feel we are "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" (Rev 3:17).

--We fail to see our *need for wisdom*—so we don't ask God for His!

--Like Peter, we fail to see our *need for help against temptation*—so we don't ask God!

--And we fail to ask God to meet our *physical needs* because we believe we can take care of them ourselves!

This morning I want to look at one last thing that pride keeps us from asking God for, and it is this—*forgiveness*. Please turn to Psalm 51. As you're turning there, here's some background on Psalm 51.

--Psalm 51 is a Psalm of David. It is referred to as a "penitential" psalm which is just a fancy way of saying it is a Psalm of *confession*. It is more than a confession, though—it is also a prayer where David asks *for mercy and forgiveness*. There are other prayers of repentance in the Bible, but this is one of the more *heart-felt* ones—probably because of the *circumstances which surrounded it*. What were the circumstances?

--David had *committed adultery* with Bathsheba—the wife of one his top military men. As a result of that affair, Bathsheba was pregnant with David's child.

--David tried covering up his sin by calling Bathsheba's husband—Uriah—in from the battlefield and sending him home to spend time with his wife. Uriah was a man of integrity and loyalty, though, and said to David in II Samuel 11:11, "The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? as thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing."

--Since David's "Plan A" didn't work, he had to come up with a "Plan B." What was "Plan B"?

--**Have Uriah killed!** But how? It would be too obvious for David to do it himself, so he came up with a plan where Uriah's death would seem like an accident. What better way than to have him *die in battle*.

How would David do that? He wrote a letter to the leader of his army—Joab—which said II Sam 11:15 "...Set ye Uriah in the *forefront* of the hottest battle, and *retire ye from him*, that he may be smitten, and die."

--One small problem—how was David going to get the letter to Joab? David then has a "light bulb" moment—albeit with a *black bulb*—and thinks to himself, 'I'll have *Uriah take the letter* to Joab.'

And that is exactly what happened! Uriah took the letter *from King David*—which gave instructions *regarding his own death*—to Joab. Joab did what the letter said, and Uriah was killed in battle. Bathsheba mourns for her husband, then David *implements the last phase of his plan*: II Sam 11:27 "And when the mourning was past, David *sent and fetched her to his house*, and *she became his wife*, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done *displeased the Lord*."

After the birth of the baby, God sends the prophet Nathan to confront David about his sin. This Psalm was written after that confrontation—and probably after the death of this little baby boy.

With that as a rather lengthy intro, please follow along as I read verses 1-7.

1. The plea for mercy

Verse 1 “Have **mercy** upon me...” What is mercy? There are longer, more detailed definitions, but this one is short, sweet, and hopefully easy to remember: “withholding judgment that is justly deserved.”

Think of the anguish that would have accompanied this prayer! David had committed adultery—which was **punishable by death** at that time—and had orchestrated Uriah being killed—which in essence was murder and also carried the **penalty of death**. His plea was **for mercy**—to **not be** punished for what he had done. We’ll see later that he wanted more than that, but he certainly wanted **his life spared!**

2. The Person of mercy

Verse 1 again: “Have mercy upon me, **O God...**”

--David certainly would have wanted forgiveness from Bathsheba—he had her husband killed!

--He also would have wanted forgiveness and mercy from Uriah’s family. The law allowed Uriah’s relatives to **take David’s life** because David intentionally and premeditatively had Uriah killed.

--But we see in David’s words recorded in verse 4—“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned”—that David understood he had sinned **against God** and God was the one he **desired mercy from!**

Will come back to verse 4 in a little bit.

We see David’s **plea** for mercy—and the **Person** that David directed this plea to. Next let’s consider...

3. The possibility of mercy

Why did David feel God would **possibly be merciful** to him? **What was his rationale** for pleading for mercy? **What did he base** his hope of forgiveness on?

A. Not based on himself

What kind of man was David? It would be easy to think—based on the number of sins that David committed in this one act—that David was an evil, wicked man. But there’s another side of David that the Bible speaks of.

--He was a man of **faith and dedication** to God. When talking to King Saul—just before taking down Goliath with a stone and sling—David said: “The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine” (I Sam 17:37).

--King Saul later turned against David and tried to **kill him** a number of times because of **his jealousy** toward David. At least twice while Saul was hunting down David, David **could have killed Saul**. Instead, he showed Saul **mercy** and spared his life.

--**And God Himself**—when **He chose David** to be the king that would replace Saul—said of David: “the LORD hath sought Him a **man after His own heart...**” (I Sam 13:14).

That is not what David based the possibility of mercy on, though. We **do not** see David saying:

“Have mercy upon me, O God, because I am a **man of faith** and fought battles for your people.”

Or “Have mercy upon me, O God, because I am a **man of mercy** & did not kill Saul when he tried killing me.”

Or “Have mercy upon me, O God, because I am a **man after your own heart!**”

Or “Have mercy upon me, O God, because you used me to write many of the Psalms and called me “the sweet Psalmist of Israel” (II Sam 23:1).

David **didn’t believe** that the possibility of mercy was **based on himself**—and neither should we! So **what did** David base it on if it wasn’t based on what **David did** or who **he was?**

B. Based on the character of God

Notice yet again verse 1. David rightly understood that **he had no merit**; there was nothing good in him **that obligated God to forgive him**. If judgment was to be withheld—and forgiveness was to take place—it was because of the **lovingkindness and mercies of God!** Notice what David says of God’s mercies.

“...according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies...”

--There is a **multitude** of them. **They are plentiful**; there is an **abundance** of them. Since God is an infinite God, His mercies are infinite, too! That’s not all; notice what **kind** of mercies they were.

--They **were tender**—gentle...and loving...; mercies that can heal that which is broken and crushed!

David understood well that if he was to be granted mercy from God, it was **because of God's goodness**—not David's! The prophet Jeremiah made a similar statement in **Lamentations 3:22-23** "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because **His compassions fail not**.²³ They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."

Do not think for a moment that God is obligated to forgive any of us **based on our merits**. Jesus corrected people that thought that way in **Mt 7:22-23** "Many will say to me [Jesus] in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?²³ And then will I profess unto them, **I never knew you**: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

And that is what Jesus will say to **everyone** who believes they can get into **God's heaven** without coming to God in God's way. **There is a way** to be forgiven—and His name is Jesus! And He is the way—the only way! Jesus Himself said that, didn't He, in John 14:6.

Back to David. David wanted mercy—that is what he pled and prayed for. The Person he wanted mercy from was God and the possibility of him getting mercy was based on the lovingkindness and mercy of God. But what was it that David **ultimately wanted**? Was it **just pardon**—the removal of the penalty of death—or was he asking for more? I believe he asked for **more than that**. I'm calling it...

4. The product of mercy

Notice the end of verse 1 "blot out my transgressions."

David doesn't say "blot out **the penalty**"—he says, "blot out **my transgressions;**" **my sin!**

'Get rid of my sin; erase it! Take it away so it no longer brings guilt to me!'

That thought continues in verse 2. "Wash me thoroughly..." literally means "multiply to wash me." In other words, "Wash me over and over again, through and through—completely!'

Let me say it again: David didn't just want the **penalty removed**—he wanted the **sin removed**! He was asking for the **seemingly impossible**—that the sin he had committed **be washed away** with the result that he would **be clean**! More important to David than being free from the **penalty of sin** was to be free **from the guilt of sin**!

5. The prerequisites for obtaining mercy

What is it that we need **to do to obtain** mercy from God? What does God **require from us** for Him to grant such a request as cleansing and forgiveness?

A. Acknowledgement of sins

Pretty straightforward, isn't it? Vs 3 "For I acknowledge my transgressions..." Let's not forget who David is talking to. He is not talking to Bathsheba—or a family member of Uriah's. He is talking **to God** and to God he is **pouring out his heart** and saying, "I acknowledge my transgressions!" 'I have sinned; I am guilty. I am not proud of it—but I do admit it and am not making excuses for it!'

--Does God want that from us? Yes, He does!

Oh, how God wants us to stop playing the "blame-game" or the "excuse claim" and own up to the fact that we have sinned! That is what David did—and that is what God wants us to do!

B. Awareness of sin

We see that, too, in vs 3: "...and my sin is ever before me." A week or so ago, I watched a movie on VCY TV called "No Greater Love." It was about a Mexican man named Ricardo Garcia who was a **drunk**—and **abused his wife**. He also **murdered a man** and after doing so, he would often have nightmares. In his nightmares, **he was running**—always running—and no matter **where he ran**, the man he had killed would be standing there, **pointing his finger at him**. He could not **get away from the guilt** he felt for killing a man!

And that, I believe, is the picture we have here. David could not be free from his guilt—and everywhere he looked, he was reminded of his sin!

--When he looked at **Bathsheba**, he remembered his sin!

--When he looked at **Joab**—the leader of his military—he remembered his sin!

--When he looked at his **top military men**—his “first 30,” the Bible calls them—there were only 29!

--When he looked at the **prophet Nathan**—the one who confronted about his sin—he remembered!

And I dare say that when he **looked in the mirror** & saw himself—he remembered! “My sin is ever before me!”

C. Accountability to God regarding his sin

Vs 4 “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight...” **Who** did David **sin against**? He sinned against Bathsheba...and Uriah...and Uriah’s family...and Joab.

He charmed and cheated...plotted and schemed...lied...and stole...and made another man an accomplice to murder! And yet, we have these words—“Against **thee, thee only**, have I sinned...”

David sinned against others—multiple others—just like you and I have. We need to ask their forgiveness, but at the end of the day, the One we have **ultimately sinned against is God!**

--God is the One—the only one—we will **stand before**—and give an account to!

--God is the One—the only one—who can **grant forgiveness** and give **true peace** and freedom from guilt!

--And God is the One who determines whether we will **spend eternity in heaven** with Him—or in hell without Him!

Next, let’s consider... **6. The pronouncement regarding mercy**

Jump ahead to vs 7 “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

To “purge” means **to purify; to remove the stain of sin** and render it gone. “Hyssop” was a plant with stiff branches and bushy leaves so it worked well for sprinkling. It was the plant used to **sprinkle the blood of a lamb** on the top and sides of the door to show **which homes the death angel was to “Pass-over”** when destroying the firstborn in Egypt the night before God’s people left there. We read about that in Ex 12:22.

David uses that picture to make the following pronouncements regarding God’s mercy:

A. God has to do the cleansing

David is not pleading his **self-clean-up efforts**. He **does not tell God** what **he is going to do** to clean himself up. He **can’t do anything** to clean himself up—and he knows it! If he is going to be clean; **God has to do it!** And so David says to God, “Purge me...wash me”

The second pronouncement is this: B. God’s cleansing works!

Vs 7 “Purge me with hyssop, and I **shall be clean**”—not might be or could be—shall be!

Second half of the verse carries the same conviction: “...wash me, and I **shall be** whiter than snow.”

It is a statement of both **faith and fact**: ‘If **you purify me**, I shall be clean. And if **you wash me**, I shall be whiter than snow.’

Lastly... **7. Personalizing the plea for mercy**

I think you’d agree that this prayer of David—what we looked at in the first 7 verses anyway—is the **proper plea for mercy**. But **what about us**? How does this **apply to us**? I’m fairly certain that none of us here have **stolen someone else’s spouse**—or **orchestrated the murder of someone!**

Since we **haven’t done that**, what sin—or sins—would **we have to commit** that would **require us** to **plead to God** for mercy? **The good news** is that there is **one sin—and only one**—that will **put you and I** in the position where we **need to cry out to God** for mercy! Isn’t that great—**only one sin** that you have to avoid?!

Now for **the bad news**—it’s too late! You’ve **already committed the sin** that will keep you out of heaven! ‘**Which one**, Pastor? Which sin **did I already commit** that bans me from heaven?’

Are you ready? Here it is...**the first one!** The first sin you and I commit **disqualifies us from heaven!** God is perfect—and so is His heaven—and no one sinful is allowed in! **Romans 3:23** “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;” meaning we all fall short of God’s standard of perfection.

All of us, then, need God's mercy! All of us need the **penalty of sin** removed! But—like David—we need more than the **penalty removed**—we need **sin itself removed!** Only God can do that and that is what Jesus' death on the cross is all about. Notice on your outline **II Corinthians 5:21...**

"For He [God] hath made Him [Jesus] to be sin for us..." Let's stop here for a moment. This is the first half of what many refer to as "the great exchange."

Our sin—and the penalty of it—was placed on Jesus. He died in our place to take our punishment. Notice now the **second half** of the verse. Still talking of Jesus, it says "who knew no sin;"—meaning Jesus was perfect—"that we might be **made the righteousness of God** in Him."

That's the **second half** of the great exchange. It is **not just that our penalty is removed** because Jesus paid for it—it is that Jesus' righteousness—**His perfectness**—is counted as being ours; as belonging to us! And so, the **seemingly impossible thing** that David longed for—to have his sins blotted out and to be purified and washed and guilt-free—is available through Christ!

Not sure if you remember or not, but one of the songs we sang earlier today posed this question: "Would you be free your burden of sin?" **The answer?** "There's power in the blood; power in the blood!"

Don't just **know about** the cleansing you can have in Christ—be a **receiver** of it!

So, what would God have us do in light of His Word this morning?

1. First and foremost, has there been a time in your life when you came to God for mercy? If not, please know that the punishment of your sins—every sin that you've ever committed—awaits you after you die! There will be no escape then; it will be too late!

But God has provided a way for you to obtain mercy—and that way is Jesus! He paid the penalty so that you don't have to—and when you receive and trust Christ, God will credit to your account His perfectness. But you need to come to God like David did—in humility and faith.

Have you done that?

2. But what about us that have already trusted Jesus as our Savior? What is the application for us? We still sin—daily—and consequently need daily cleansing! Our sin is not any less sinful because we are a child of God. In fact, it might be more sinful! We have felt the joy of being forgiven—the blessing of an indescribable peace in our heart—and yet choose to disobey the one who loved us and gave Himself for us!

How often we—as God's children—need to be looking to and claiming I John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."