

ST. BARTHOLOMEW’S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY

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Scripture: Ps. 51; 2 Samuel 11-12

“The Only Way Out”

MOVIES AND REAL LIFE

We’ve seen it in the movies; when the hero or heroine is in a terrible predicament. It’s a life or death situation, and they only have one chance to get out, only one way to escape. My favorite movie escape is in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, when Indiana Jones flees from the Inca Temple after taking a gold statue. At first, he thinks he’s made it and the coast is clear but then the earth shakes and the ground underneath him gives way and he is running for his life. After overcoming a series of close calls, we then see him running to his plane with hundreds of native warriors chasing him. Such moments grip our attention because they draw us into the drama, and make us feel like we are in the hero’s shoes. It is as if we too, are trying to escape.

Well, there will be times in our lives when spiritually we will feel like there is no escape, that there is no way out. Times when we feel overwhelmed or enveloped by darkness. Times when we feel like we don’t measure up or we are a failure. Often such times come after we have done something wrong, or when we have fallen away from the Lord. And it doesn’t matter how spiritual we feel or how many right things we are doing, we are all susceptible to falling in our walks with the Lord. And if you think you’ve got it all together, then look out. Concerning temptation, the Bible warns us in **1 Cor. 10:12**, *“let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”*

PSALM 51 – A MOST IMPORTANT PSLAM

Now this morning we read from one of the most important Psalms in the Bible, Psalm 51. We usually read this Psalm in the Church several times throughout the year, notably on Ash Wednesday and on Good Friday. Psalms were poems written by various men of God, the majority (at least 73) by David. They were put to music. They are prayers and praises as well as laments, and they not only express the full range of human emotions they contain essential truths about God, who He is, what He has done, what He has promised and what He is going to do. They’re so important that the Daily Office includes them every day, and they are always part of our worship services, not just on Sundays but weddings and funerals as well. I am told that Billy Graham would read three Psalms and three chapters of Proverbs each day as part of his devotions.

Now today’s Psalm, **Psalm 51**, is a Psalm written by David after the most disgraceful event of his life. Many of you know the story, but I think it would be helpful to review it again. It’s described in **2 Samuel 11-12**, and it serves as the backdrop for the 51st Psalm.

DAVID’S FALL FROM GOD

Now understand that David is King of Israel. He is God’s leader, a man *“after God’s own heart.”* He has seen the power of God. He has experienced God’s blessing. And yet, he falls to temptation. He blows it big time. One day in the early spring, he is out walking on the roof of his palace and he looks and he spots a woman bathing down in the courtyard of one of the homes near the palace. He likes what he sees. He is attracted to the physical beauty of this woman. The Hebrew refers to “a person of striking

physical appearance.” So he finds out who she is. She is Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite. She’s a married woman! In fact, her husband is one of the captains in the army of Israel and he is off fighting in battle. Though Uriah was a Hittite he was undoubtedly a follower of the Lord as his name literally means “Yahweh is my light.” But that doesn’t stop David. He has Bathsheba brought to him and he has sexual relations with her. Although David had many wives, although he even had concubines, that wasn’t enough. He took another man’s wife!

A month later David hears four fateful words that would change his life forever, Bathsheba tells him, **“I am with child.”** Bathsheba was pregnant and it was David’s child! So David decides to try and cover up his sin. He calls Uriah from the battlefield and gives him some R&R. He is hoping he will spend time with his wife. But Uriah is an honorable man and does not go to his house. Rather he stays with the soldiers on guard at the palace. He tells the King since it is wartime, he will not go to be with his wife since it was a soldier’s duty to refrain from sexual relations when the nation is at war. Frustrated, David sends Uriah back to the battlefield and commands the commander of the forces, Joab, to put him in the frontlines so he is killed. What makes matters worse is that David has Uriah carry the instructions of his own demise back to the commander.

Unchecked sin always leads to more sin, doesn’t it? We dig a whole deeper and deeper and deeper. David went from lust to adultery to murder. All in an attempt to cover his sin.

The Bible says in **Proverbs 28:13**, **“He that covers his sins will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy.”** Here is the principle that we need to understand. In other words, the sins which we cover, God will uncover. But the sins which we uncover, God will cover. Yes, there is a way out.

“YOU ARE THE MAN!”

But for almost a year, David tried to cover his sin. He took Bathsheba as his wife and she gave birth to a son. Undoubtedly, during this time David was miserable, far from God. But the Lord wasn’t done with David. God sent Nathan the prophet to call David back to repentance. Nathan tells David a parable. He tells it as if it is a real life example. He says to the king that there was a rich man who had many flocks and herds, and a poor man who had just one lamb which he had raised for his family. Now a traveler came to visit the rich man and instead of killing one of his own animals, the rich man took the poor man’s only sheep, and then killed and prepared it for the visitor. Upon hearing this injustice, David was enraged, and said the man deserves death and must make restitution for the lamb fourfold because he did this thing and had no compassion.

And that was when David heard four more fateful words, words that would uncover David’s sin. The prophet Nathan said, “You are the man.” It was at that point that David realized what a terrible evil he had committed. David, I am sure, fell to his knees before Almighty God and we are told that he confessed his sins to the Lord. Psalm 51 is a summary of that confession; a beautiful expression of one’s sorrow before the Lord; a sorrow not of mere regret, but a sorrow that led to repentance.

Would David still suffer the consequences of his sin? Yes. The baby conceived with Bathsheba and born soon died just seven days after his birth. David’s Kingdom eventually was plagued by internal strife. He did not have the anointing of God he once had. But His relationship with God was restored. That my friends is what is most important in life, isn’t it? Our relationship with the Living God. Jesus said, **“What shall it profit if a man gain the whole world, but forfeit his soul?” (Mt. 16:26).**

If we are going to get out of the pit that sin digs in our lives, if we are to find a way out when we've done wrong, when our heart has grown cold and distant, then we need to understand the process of repentance. God's Word gives us a pathway, it's found in Psalm 51. Please turn with me to it once more. We're going to find that when we have been defeated by sin, there are four steps we can take to come back to God.

I AM GUILTY

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness; in your great compassion blot out my offenses. Wash me through and through from my wickedness and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight. And so you are justified when you speak and upright in your judgment. Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth, a sinner from my mother's womb.” (Ps. 51:1-6)

God is a loving God, but God is also a just God. And so if we are to get out of the pit of sin, we need to recognize that all sin is against God and that we are guilty as individuals before the Lord. The Bible says, *“There is none righteous, no not one.” “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”* Notice what David says, *“I have been a sinner from my mother's womb.”* We call this original sin. In other words, every human being is born a sinner. There is no good in and of ourselves outside of God. There are some who hold to the essential goodness of man. But the Bible is clear, there is no good in us apart from the Living God. And without God, we are evil. But not only do we need to recognize our guilt, we need to admit our own culpability in this guilt.

I WAS WRONG

Second, we need to take personal responsibility for our sin. Notice where David lays the blame, not on others, not on the devil, not on how he was raised, not on his environment, but on himself. *“I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me... I have sinned and done what is evil.”* There can be no healing in our relationship with God unless we admit that our own disobedience is the problem.

I AM SORRY, PLEASE FORGIVE ME

And then after we take personal responsibility we need to trust in the Lord as the only One who can cleanse us from our sins and restore our relationship with Him. David prays, *“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness; in your great compassion blot out my offenses... Wash me through and through from my wickedness and cleanse me from my sin.”* Only God can cleanse us. He shows us mercy by forgiving us. But we need to ask for forgiveness. It isn't just saying we are sorry but asking God to forgive us. That is true repentance. While grace refers to God giving us those good things which we do not deserve, God's mercy is not giving us what we do deserve in terms of punishment.

I LOVE YOU

David continues by praying in verse 10, *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”* Why does David pray this prayer? So he can truly love the Lord. This is the final step. After asking for and receiving God's forgiveness we need to affirm that we will continue to seek after the Lord and live for Him. David prays further, *“Give me the joy of your saving help again and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit. I shall teach your ways to the wicked, and sinners shall return to you. Deliver me from death, O God, and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness, O God of my salvation. Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise. Had you desired it, I would*

have offered sacrifice, but you take no delight in burnt-offerings. The sacrifices of God is a troubled spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” (Ps. 51:12-17).

Our sacrifices, our good deeds, anything we do cannot cover our sin. Only God can cover our sin. He does it in response to a broken and contrite heart. A heart that admits guilt, a heart that takes responsibility, and a heart that asks for forgiveness. And in return God will renew the joy of our salvation. Joy is God’s work in us, it is more than a mere feeling of happiness, it is being content in resting in God, the security of having been reconciled to God and at peace with Him. And such joy will renew our love for God.

THE MEANS OF RESTORATION

David repented and turned from his wickedness. He became a man after God’s own heart once more. And his relationship with God was restored. But the basis or the means of this restoration would be revealed to our world nearly 1000 years after David’s life. The Lord Jesus Christ came to deal once and for all with the penalty of sin. He came to take away the sins of the world. That’s what God’s Word teaches plain and simple even though there are some in the church who do not believe this. They don’t believe the world needs a Savior. They are gravely mistaken.

Yes, Jesus died to demonstrate God’s love for us, but He also died to fulfill God’s justice. King David was forgiven but he was forgiven because of what Christ would do for him once and for all within the time space continuum of human history. The Scriptures teach us that Christ came at the fullness of time to take away sin past, present, and future. Whether they knew it or not, when the Israelites sacrificed to God to cover their sin, they were simply setting the stage for God to show the world that only He could take away sin. Only He could provide the perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ His Son. A Son who learned obedience through suffering and a Son who demonstrated love by dying in our place. Jesus said in **Jn. 15:13**, “*Greater love has no one than this than one who lays down his life for his friends.*”

Ps. 103:10 reminds us that “*as far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our transgressions from us.*” My friends God did that on the cross. How far is the east from the west? It’s another way of saying forever. But I like how it is described in a recent popular song by the Christian band, *Casting Crowns*, how far is the east from the west? “From one nailed scared hand to the other.” Christ did it. The price has been paid. Sin’s price has been paid.

So next time you feel overwhelmed and in the pit of despair, turn to the One who can cleanse you and set you free. Turn and admit your guilt, acknowledge your sin, ask for forgiveness and pray that the Lord create in you a clean heart so that you can once again love Him and live for Him. That, my friends, is the way out. It is the only way and it is the way that leads to eternal life. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!