

Psalm 51

by Henry Law

Psalm 51 is a heartfelt cry for mercy and pardon, and a desire for renewing and sanctifying grace, as the psalmist seeks to restore his relationship with God.

Scripture: Psalm 51:3

Topics: "Repentance", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

Henry Law preaches on Psalm 51, a heartfelt prayer of repentance and seeking forgiveness, commonly used by believers in their meditations and prayers. The psalmist acknowledges his transgressions, confesses his sins, and pleads for God's mercy and cleansing. Sin is recognized as rebellion against God, and the need for a clean heart and renewal by God's Spirit is emphasized. The psalmist desires restoration of joy, salvation, and a heart willing to teach others God's ways, while seeking deliverance from guilt and offering praise from a contrite heart.

Transcript

Of all the Psalms, this is the one, perhaps, which is most frequently interwoven in the believer's prayers and pondered in his meditations. It has been the outbreak of innumerable hearts, and has been, and still is, the wrestling cry at the mercy-seat. Repeated are the prayers for pardon of vile guilt; struggling are the cries for renewing and sanctifying grace. Professions are uttered of devotedness to God's service, and prayers are added for the Church.

1, 2. "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according unto the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."

In the deepest sense of guilt, prayer cries loudly for mercy. The measure of needed mercy is expressed. The measure is quite measureless. It is according to God's lovingkindness. But His love is everlasting love. It has no origin. It can have no end. It is, moreover, in accordance with the multitude of God's tender mercies. But who can count them? Infinitude is their scope. Such mercy is indeed needed; for nothing less than limitless mercy could reach the extent of the prayer for the remission of such transgressions, such iniquity, and such sin.

3. "For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me."

The awakened sinner panted for relief; for grievous was the burden which oppressed him. He did not cloak his dreadful guilt--he felt it, and he confessed it. He did not strive to escape the tormenting memory. There was an appalling object ever in his sight--his fearful deeds. He is not taunted of God, who is not conscious of ever-present guilt.

4. "Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight; that You might be justified when You speak, and be clear when You judge."

The real character of sin is rebellion against God. This constitutes its essence, its magnitude, its malignity. Doubtless fellow-men may be most grievously injured and outraged and afflicted. Many may be wounded; many tears may have been drawn forth, but the main evil assails God. The blow is aimed at God's supremacy.

Hence God's truth and justice are exalted to their highest pinnacles. In every threat, in every denunciation, in every execution of vengeance, homage is rendered to these essential attributes. When sin is punished, holiness is vindicated.

5. "Behold, I was shaped in iniquity; and in sin my mother conceived me."

Sin is here traced to nature's original corruption. The tree is radically corrupt. No good fruit can hang from its branches. The spring is poisoned, the waters which flow from it are polluted. When Adam yielded to the tempter's wiles, the whole line of his descendants perished in him. Sad, indeed, is our case, except redeeming grace transplants us from the ruined stock, and grafts us into the heavenly vine.

6. "Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part You shall make me to know wisdom."

When sin is deeply felt and openly confessed, conscience feels that God requires true sincerity throughout the heart. The folly of mocking God with unmeaning tears or unreal prayers is felt; and there is most earnest supplication to God to implant wisdom in the heart and soul, and to guide in the way everlasting.

7. "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Obliteration of guilt is again implored in terms fragrant with Gospel-sweetness. Faith clearly sees the purpose of sacrificial rites. It knows that the blood streaming from the dying victim foreshadowed the blood of the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. It knows that this blood is expiation perfect, entire, and forevermore; that its sprinkling removes every stain of evil, and makes the contrite believer pure as purity can be in the sight of God.

8. "Make me hear joy and gladness; that the bones which You have broken may rejoice."

The anguish of the soul under sense of God's wrath is pictured by the keenest pains of body; even by the agony of bones fractured and bruised. When healing comes, how great is the relief! Such is the transport of delight which thrills through the soul when God restores His smile, and whispers peace to the conscience. Let each mourning penitent cease not the wrestling cry, "Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which You have broken may rejoice."

9. "Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities."

Pardon is still the foremost thought in the contrite Psalmist's mind. He supplicates it under another image. He fears lest God should keep his sins in the light of His countenance. He therefore prays that an averted look should no more have them in view. Conscious of innumerable transgressions, and feeling need of entire pardon, he beseeches that not one single offense should remain unsprinkled by the obliterating blood.

10, 11. "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence; and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me."

Desire of pardon is linked to earnest longing for renewing and sanctifying grace. The cleansing of the heart is the absolute work of God. It is a new creation. It is calling that into existence which no power of man could accomplish. Conscious of utter impotence, the cry struggles for creating and renewing grace. Supplication is added for continuance of God's life-giving presence, and the perpetual indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

12, 13. "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation; and uphold me with Your free Spirit; then will I teach transgressors Your ways; and sinners shall be converted to You."

Who can express the joy of realized salvation! It is heaven begun. It is the commencement of the never-ending bliss. But it may be forfeited and interrupted for a while. Allowed sin is quick to extinguish. Let instant recourse be made to prayer. Let God, who only gave and only can renew, be supplicated to restore. The effect of this reviving grace is earnest effort to call others to the ways of God, and faith in Christ. He who enjoys this gracious treasure burns with longing that others may partake.

14. "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, God of my salvation; and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness."

Remembrance of some special sin will oftentimes haunt the heart. A frightful specter will stand before the eyes. It was so now with David. The dreadful thought was present, that his abominable sin had caused a fellow-creature's death. He saw that his hands were stained with murderous spots. He must be a stranger to all peace, until sure of deliverance from this heinous guilt. With his soul, therefore, he prays that such mercy might be given unto him. The result would be sure; he would be loud in praise, proclaiming that God was a covenant-keeping God, and righteous in fulfilling His promises to forgive all sin through the atoning blood.

15, 16. "O Lord, open my lips; and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. For You do not desire sacrifice, else would I give it; You do not delight in burnt-offering."

When the grace of praise is freely poured into the heart, the power to give utterance must still be added. A channel must be opened for the stream to flow. An open lip must be desired, in addition to a full heart. Faith sees that the outward rite of sacrificial homage is not the real demand of God. Required services may not be withheld; they testify obedience. But they should do much more. They should evince the soul's entire dependence on the hidden meaning--the true Lamb of God, the all-atoning blood, the death which satisfies every violated attribute. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

17. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise."

God is a Spirit, and His eye is on a spiritual service. He does not turn with indifference from a spirit broken and crushed, and ground to powder, by the weighty hand of the accusing law. He sees the buddings of

real faith, and true apprehension of the appeasing victim. He is ever ready to bind up that which is thus broken. Happy are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

18, 19. "Do good in Your good pleasure unto Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem. Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering, and whole burnt-offering; then they shall offer bullocks upon Your altar."

The penitent cannot conclude without embracing the whole Church in his fervent prayer; he supplicates mercy for his beloved Zion, and protection from all her foes. Safe in the loving-kindness of her God, her altars will blaze, the victims will die in countless numbers, the blood will flow in constant stream; but it will not be a mere superabundance of outward rites. In all Christ is seen. Christ is magnified. Christ is honored. Christ is All.

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