

Pure Heart, Pure Church - Part 1

by Leonard Ravenhill

Leonard Ravenhill explores the depth of repentance in Psalm 51, emphasizing the need for genuine emotion in both worship and preaching.

Duration: 9:40

Scripture: Exodus 34:6, Psalm 51:1-2, Psalm 51:7, Psalm 51:10, Psalm 51:17, Psalm 86:5, Psalm 86:15, Romans 3:23-24

Topics: "Repentance", "Mercy"

Description

This sermon delves into Psalm 51, highlighting David's deep repentance and plea for God's mercy after his sins of murder and adultery. It emphasizes the timeless nature of God's opinion of man, contrasting it with the changing opinions of men about God over time. The psalm is described as a profound expression of confession and repentance, punctuated not by stops and commas, but by groans, tears, and agony. The importance of coming to God as sinners, pleading for His mercy, is underscored through David's heartfelt words.

Transcript

I thought about this simple thing this morning, that men's opinions of God change very much in the passing of time. But God's opinion of man never changes, it's established once and forever in his word. I want us to think about a psalm which is a favorite of mine, the 51st psalm.

Just to remind you, there are 150 psalms in the Bible, sometimes they call it the psalm of the day. It still is, I believe, the Jewish hymn book, it still gives us the most profound expressions that can be found in song with all our modern singing. No one touches the heights or the depths like the psalmist.

Out of the 150 psalms, roughly half of them, which is 75 in case you don't know, 75 of them were written by David. Of the 75, 18 of them are autobiographical, that is, they all spin around his own experiences. There are seven penitential psalms.

One of them has to be the greatest and surely it is this 51st psalm. Until fairly recently, I guess some of you will remember anyhow, Leonard Bernstein was the conductor of New York Philharmonic Orchestra, very distinguished, very capable, he wrote that great mass that was sung at the funeral of Kennedy and he's a classical pianist in his own right, an exhibitionist. A friend of his was in Europe and he brought back a dog-eared manuscript, took it to Leonard Bernstein's house, incidentally he lived in the same house where John Lennon was killed outside, but the man said to him, Leonard, play this for me.

He looked at the manuscript, he said, I can't, he said, you can, but you won't, he said, I can't, why not? This is an old manuscript, it's 200 years old. I paid an exorbitant price for it in Europe. Again Leonard looked at it and said, I can't play this, why not? He said, if I could have crept up by the side of the organist as he was working this music out and I could have caught his spirit, his cadences, his expressions, maybe I could have done it.

There's a gap of 200 years from the time he wrote it to now and all the atmosphere has evaporated. You know, that's very true about the word of God too, except the spirit of God takes it, the letter killeth. In case you haven't noticed, this psalm is a monologue.

David includes no one else. How did he say it? How did he write it? He sure didn't dictate it into a machine. I doubt if he had a secretary.

In your Bible it's, I don't know anything about type, Martin is here, he might know what type this is, but it's some kind of type on a white sheet. It's punctuated with commas and periods. It's written in ink.

No, this psalm was written with blood. It is not punctuated with stops and commas, it's punctuated with groans and tears and agony. You know, if actors were to say their lines like most preachers preach, they'd never get through their audition.

They'd be rejected the first time. Years ago in Scotland, an envious preacher watched the crowds trying to get into a theatre and every night they were turned away in their hundreds. And he thought about his empty seats in his church Sunday by Sunday.

So he made it his problem, his task, to visit the actor, a famous Shakespearean actor. Maybe Burton that just died was the greatest Shakespearean actor that ever lived. He could quote almost every word that Shakespeare wrote, and he wrote tens of thousands.

If you ask Hamlet the second act, he'd quote it like that. What did Lady Macbeth say, so and so, he'd quote it, quote it, quote it. He was soaked in Hamlet so that he knew the thing from beginning to end.

It was dramatic. Well the actor said to the preacher, the reason I pack this place maybe is this, and the reason you don't pack your place maybe is this. I make artificial things look real, and you make real things look artificial.

I heard a preacher last Sunday on TV for a few minutes. He talked as though he was giving a weather report, and bad weather at that. He was about as tasty as uncooked fish.

And I don't wonder people turn, when Dave Wilkerson was in Detroit a few weeks ago, amongst all those Muslims and other people on the streets, he asked those kids, lusting, fighting, scarred as they were, smelling evil on their bodies, smelling badly with their breaths, he asked them, who is your favorite radio, TV preacher? Time after time he said, pfft, we don't listen to them, all they want is our money. Isn't that shocking when kids in the street under the grip of the devil can only say you want our money? How did David recite this thing? I say he punctuated it with sobs and commas, not stops and commas, but sobs, with grief. How do I know? Because he's come to God with that which alone is acceptable to God, when we come to him as sinners.

Let me say this first, the constitution of the psalm is fascinating as far as I'm concerned. In verse 1, let me say, how does he say, have mercy upon me O God, he doesn't say pity me Lord I'm in trouble, he doesn't

say excuse me Lord I've broken a commandment or two, he comes pleading the only thing that we can plead, have mercy upon me O God. Over here in another psalm of David, 86, he says in verse 5, for thou Lord art good and ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call unto thee.

Verse 15, that thou O Lord art a God full of compassion and gracious, longsuffering and plenteous in mercy and in truth, which is borrowed by David from the 34th chapter in Exodus. Here is a man who is bowed down in grief, quote Shakespeare again, remember Lady Macbeth has a black spot or a blood spot on her hand, and what does she say about it? She says, well here is, she says this damp spot, all the perfumes in Arabia cannot cleanse it. David has a black spot of murder on one hand, a red spot of murder on one hand, a black spot of adultery on the other hand.

And he comes saying, have mercy upon me O God, me, notice there, have mercy upon me O God, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies brought out, my transgressions wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin against thee, thee only have I sinned. You say, no he sinned against Bathsheba, I don't think he did, he sinned with her. But he is making confession here of his own sin.

He says, blot out my transgressions. By real definition transgression means I acknowledge my rebellion, I acknowledge my disobedience. He hadn't gone into sin ignorantly, he had been tempted again and again with that woman and then finally...

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