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## “Clean Within”

Sermon Series: *Clean Slate*, No.

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### Psalm 51-1-12

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

*1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.*

*5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. 6 Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.*

*7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. 8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. 9 Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.*

*10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

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We're in the book of Psalms this morning...Psalm 51, if you'd care to turn there with me.

These past few weeks, we've been talking about "clean slates," which is just another way to say a re-do...a new beginning...a fresh start.

We began three weeks ago by talking about Jesus' **willingness** to **give** us clean slates. Jesus...our savior...the one who died for us...He's not stingy. On the contrary...He's not only **able**, but He is **absolutely willing** to give people forgiveness, and the clean slate that comes with it.

Two Sundays ago, we talked about what it feels like when God **does** forgive us...when that heavy hand of either guilt or conviction or both is lifted off of us.

If you're a Christian here today, do you remember how you felt when you first came to Jesus? I do... felt like the weight of the world was lifted off of me...like I could just drift away. That's

the sort of life God wants us to lead...that's what can come from really trusting Him, day to day, with our troubles.

God takes away the heaviness that life in a sinful world brings.

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Then last Sunday morning, we talked about how God's clean slate offer is not blocked by our pasts...or our families.

God's ability to restore and remake is not limited by any of the ways we've been victimized or abused...or even by unhealthy, generational family practices. God cuts through all that...or at least He's *willing* to, and He's *able* to...if we'd but *invite* Him to do it.

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Today, we're talking a bit more about what's required of *us* to *experience* a clean slate.

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Two weeks ago, we looked at Psalm 32, which I said is one of the seven "penitential" psalms. They're called that because they express this deep sense of remorse and regret; they confess sin and ask God for forgiveness and pardon.

All seven contain, if not the *sentence*, at least the *sentiment*, "*I have sinned.*"

But *this* one...Psalm 51...gives us the fullest exposition of what that means.

Martin Luther wrote, "Whoever called Psalm 51 a penitential knew what he was doing, for surely the doctrine of true repentance is set forth here before us."

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Other psalms also cry out to God for help, like this one does, but then they also describe some external source of their trouble.

This one does not. There is no complaint here against other people or against God.

The writer, King David, knew that the trouble here, was wholly within. David knew the trouble was his own sinful self.

And that gets to the real kernel of *honest repentance*...it's two-fold actually.

The first is *realizing, knowing* and *owning* the fact that the *problem* is *mine*.

Though we have all been hurt or offended or treated poorly in this broken world, honest repentance comes in realizing that the problem with sin is not someone else's. The problem is ours.

That's first. Repentance that's honest means recognizing that the problem of sin is our own.

And then the second element of true repentance is realizing that our failures are *not* just about what we *do*, but that our failures somehow come from who we *are*.

Our problem is not just about what we *do*, but about *why* we *do* what we *do*.

The problem is not just about what we *say*, but *why* we say what we say.

Our problem with sin goes deeper than the surface.

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You see, you can keep a thief from stealing by just tying him to a tree in his yard, and you can keep an insulting or profane person from saying insulting and profane things by just stuffing something in her mouth.

But those aren't real solutions, are they? That doesn't really address the issue, because there's something *internal* going on...something *deeper* than a rope or a muzzle can fix.

Repentance that's real understands **1)** that the problem is mine, and, **2)** that it really begins inside. King David understood that about himself.

Of course he committed terrible sins outwardly. You think you've done bad things? I'll bet not like King David.

David wrote this psalm in response to that chapter of his life involving Bathsheba; you can find the whole story in the eleventh chapter of the book of Second Samuel, but here's the abbreviated version:

First, David chose to stay home from the work he should have been doing.

Maybe some of us have done that, so to this point, we have something in common with him.

But doing that caused David to have too much time on his hands, and with that time, even though he already had multiple wives, David fell into lust with, and then misused his power to seduce and sleep with, Bathsheba – a married woman...and of course she became pregnant.

So then, after trying and failing to cover up his responsibility for her pregnancy, he arranges to have her husband – one of his most loyal soldiers – killed in battle.

That's a pretty substantial list of sins right there.

David sinned against himself, against Bathsheba, and against Uriah...Bathsheba's husband.

He also sinned against his own family, his nation, his position, and all future generations.

And yet, David says there in verse four that He sinned only against God, and that's because, though he knew that he'd sinned against all those others, David recognized that his primary crime, as all sin is, was against His Maker and Sustainer and Provider...and...He knew that it was with God that repentance had to start, since it was only God who could even begin to set things right in his life again.

When the prophet Nathan (who was one brave dude, I might add) when Nathan brought all this to light, David realized he needed forgiveness for all these things he'd done...and so he asks for that.<sup>1</sup>

Verse 1 there, David prayed: ***“God...blot out my transgressions.”*** Verse 2: ***“Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”*** Verse 9, ***“Remove my iniquity.”***

David asks for ***forgiveness*** for these things he'd done. David asked God to ***justify*** him.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel 12

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But you see, beyond what he'd done, David **knew** that something **bigger** was affecting him. Something was wrong **inside** Him that needed to be righted.

The problem was **deeper** than just the sinful acts.

It's as though David asked himself, "What made me do this? What made me put aside what I know is right and choose instead to do the wrong?"

It's as if David asked himself those questions...and was then repulsed at what he found...because he found a deep stain on his character. He discovered corruption at his motive level.

And so David then asks God for a **cleansing** of his **spirit**...a **re-ordering** of his **gut** so that his **inward thoughts**...his **heart**...his **motives** would be pure.

Verse 7 there...David prays, God, "**Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.**" Verse 10, "**Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.**"

You see, that's the deeper work of repentance. That's **sanctification**...to be cleansed, purified, restored **inwardly** so we can be clean and pure and holy **outwardly**.

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The fact is, that's how we maintain that light feeling of living in forgiveness: we ask God to cleanse us **inside**...to take away those sinful inclinations and motivations such that we no longer commit those same **outward** sins over and over again. Which means we don't have to feel that same guilt and shame over and over again, and we don't need to ask for God's forgiveness over and over again.

To be sanctified...cleansed...purified within.

David knew there had to be a way to overcome those temptations and to live above and beyond those gnawing, besetting sins.

And that way is sanctification...at least that's how the New Testament puts it.

It's the deeper, cleansing work of God **inside** that then **transforms** what rises up and is revealed on the **outside**.

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Hey, it's the same thing as we experience with our physical bodies.

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A few weeks ago, Scott back there...we prayed for him...he came through heart valve replacement surgery.

Scott was feeling tired, weak, probably some pain here and there...he knew something was wrong.

Now, a doctor could have prescribed him pain medications, maybe told him to get more sleep or exercise more or eat better or take vitamins or some other sort of drug...all to treat the *symptoms*.

And those might even work, to a degree and for a time.

But in the end, you see, the thing that's causing the issue is still there.

We can treat symptoms until the cows come home, but the problem won't really be solved because the problem is inside. Even though it can't be seen, it's the thing that causing all the symptoms.

So a good doctor would say, "Let's not treat just symptoms. Let's get to the heart of it," no pun intended.

"Why waste a bunch of time and energy treating just the symptoms when you can treat the core issue?"

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That's how God wants us to think about sin and forgiveness.

Sure, God forgives sins.

But God wants to do more. God wants to go deeper. God wants to repair the valve, so the symptoms don't come back.

God doesn't want to stick water purifiers on every faucet in our house.

God wants to deal with the spring, or the well, or the water tower, or the river. Wherever we get our water from, God wants to cleanse the *source*...so what flows out is pure.

God wants people to be clean within...and that cleansing...the very same that David asked for...God has made available to us...in our day...through His Holy Spirit.

The same thing David wanted for himself, the Apostle Paul wanted for the Christians at Thessalonica, where he prayed, ***"Now, may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."***<sup>2</sup>

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Are you tired of treating just the symptoms?

Do you want a truly clean slate, both inside and out?

There's more that can be done. There's more God wants to do.

It requires the same sort of honesty and vulnerability we see in King David here...the sort that will just admit to God, "I don't want to be like I am anymore. I want to be deeply different. I want to be clean, not just outside, but inside...where the temptations attach...where the sin really starts." It takes that kind of vulnerability and honesty.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:23

If you want to be that kind of clean ... clean within ... Even now, if you know God is pointing out to you something inside...and He's asking you, "How about this? Will you address this? Will you give that to me and let me clean that up for you?"

Don't ignore Him...don't deny Him the opportunity to purify you...to sanctify you even further...even more.

Because there's always more He can do...

there's always more He wants to do...

and there's always more He will do to make us more like Jesus.

**Prayer:** Father, we pray as David prayed, even as we come to Your table here today, that you would not only forgive our sins, but that you would also cleanse us deep within.

If there is a further, purifying work You'd like to accomplish in us today, let us be a open to You as David was...that you might create in us all pure hearts and renewed spirits...for our own good and for Your glory displayed in our lives...

**Communion:**

**Closing Word and Benediction:**

If you can, when you have a moment, if you're technologically inclined, try to find an old recording, maybe on YouTube, of Charlie Peacock singing these words of Psalm 51. I heard him sing those words decades ago, and they've stayed in my head, I think because he sang them with the same vulnerability and passion that King David originally wrote them.

"Oh God, You've shown me...and so I see who I am inside, and I don't want to be this way. I don't want to do the things that come from being this way, so, yes, please do forgive me...but more than that...cleanse me...purify me...transform me on the inside, so I'll please you with all I am...so I'll live before you, before the world and before myself with a clean slate."

Make I so, Lord, for all of us as it was for David. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Thank you for coming to worship today. Go in peace.

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