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## “Forgiveness – Means Being Clean”

Sermon Series: Forgiveness, No. 4

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### Psalm 51:1-10

*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.*

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If you'd like, you're welcome to turn back to this morning's text – the first ten verses of Psalm 51.

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[ *places bottle of Mr. Clean on pulpit* ]

Does anyone here use this...or at least recognize this guy? Mr. Clean. This stuff's been around a long time...came out in 1958, I learned.

He looks good for his age.

[ *opens bottle and stiffs* ]

I'll tell you...this is a smell from my childhood.

My uncle used to use this in cleaning his rental houses...which means...I used to use it since I did a lot of that cleaning when I worked for him as a teenager.

Actually, a funny story about this...when I was pastoring near Pittsburgh, Annette and I owned an old rental house in my hometown. One Monday morning we were working there ... painting some of the rooms, and I needed some sort of supplies, so I walked down to Milligan's hardware store – it was about a block away.

Walking through the alley there downtown, I passed a local kid walking the other way. I waved at him and said, “Morning.”

He looked me up and down, kind of grinned, and said, “Hey yo, what’s up Mr. Clean?”

I thought, “What?” but then I realized I was wearing light tan shorts and a white tee shirt ... and this haircut ... so... [ *pauses and rubs bald head; congregation laughs* ]

“Hey yo, what’s up Mr. Clean?” I laugh every time I see this stuff.

[ *opens bottle and stiffs* ]

This is also a smell from my childhood because when I was a little kid, I remember my mom, in the spring, using this and water in a bucket to wash down the walls, the doors, the baseboards...the trim of our home. It was part of herspring cleaning.

For a while there we heated our house, in part, with wood, and so you knew spring had arrived when the house didn’t smell like smoke and fire anymore. With the windows opened and the walls washed, it smelled all fresh and new and ... well ... [ *sniffs open bottle* ] clean. [ *replaces lid on bottle* ]

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I just wrote in this month’s Plumblin about how there’s something about spring that makes me want to wash the cars and scrub and purge the house...inside and out...get rid of the winter’s accumulation of different sorts of junk.

There’s something about spring that makes me want to feel lighter...freer...less encumbered, you know?

It’s the pursuit of being fresh and new and...clean.

That’s what the writer of this psalm was looking for too. He wanted to be clean...fresh and pure and light and free...because he was dirty, and he knew it.

He’d gone through a dark, winter season of life and had accumulated **not a little junk**...and it weighed on him...and he wanted...he **needed** release from that.

The walls of his heart smelled of smoke and they needed to be washed. He **needed**...some Mr. Clean.

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The text plainly tells us that King David wrote this prayer...and we’re even told the occasion...he wrote this after Nathan the prophet confronted him about his sins...first of **adultery** with Bathsheba and **then** his **arrangement** of the **murder** of Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah.

The sordid details are there for us to read in the book of 2 Samuel, chapters 11 and 12, but what’s important for us to know today is...**few** people in the **world** have done **worse** things than King David did.

And David came to realize that, but not immediately. There was at least **some** time between his **sin** and David’s **repentance** for his sins.

We can't say for sure what was in David's heart during those intervening days. It may well be that he felt **conviction**; that burning, inescapable awareness that just will **not** subside...that tends to whisper to us, in life's quiet moments, "Hey, things are not good between you and God."

That is conviction, and I'd imagine that, as sensitive a soul as David was, those moments **did** arise within him.

Just the same, we know that it required God moving this fellow, Nathan, to confront him in order to bring David's repentance to fullness. It was only after Nathan showed David what he'd done that David admitted, "***I have sinned against the Lord.***"<sup>1</sup>

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You see, even for the best of us, sometimes it takes an outside voice to clarify the Lord's conviction. We all have blind spots that require an outside perspective to reveal.

And that's the work of real friendship, isn't it? Or maybe God gives that job to a spouse, a co-worker, even a preacher. From time to time, we all need a Nathan in our lives.

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How David **replies** to Nathan, though...what David says back in Samuel, "***I have sinned against the Lord,***" and even here in verse 4, saying to God, "***Against you and you only, have I sinned;***" that strikes us as incomplete, doesn't it?

Hearing that, we think, "What do you **mean**, you only sinned 'against ***the Lord***?' What about against ***Bathsheba*** and ***Uriah***? What about your sin against your own ***wife*** and ***children***? What about your sin against all your ***people*** and your ***soldiers*** and your ***position*** as king?"

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David **did**, of course, sin against all those people.

In fact, the notion that a person can sin ***at all without*** injuring ***other people*** is ***inconceivable*** in Scripture.

No matter how ***private*** our sin may ***seem***, it ***always*** affects others. Even idolatry, which might be thought to concern only our relationship to the Lord, is understood in the Bible to severely damage ***whole communities***.

No, David knew that he'd sinned against all those people. But David also understood that, in the ultimate sense, He'd really sinned against God.

***All*** sin is ultimately against God...because it's God who determines the sanctity of, in David's case, the marriage vows and the marriage bed.

It's God who determines the sacredness of human life.

In fact, in spite of the humanistic moral relativism our culture tries to sell, the fact is, apart from God's relationship to humanity, there would be no sin. Sin is theological by definition; the whole concepts of right and wrong begin and end in God; and so it's God and God alone whose way and will reveal human actions as sin.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel 12:13

David acknowledges that very thing there at the end of verse 4 where he says, ***“I have done what is evil in your sight.”***

Certainly, our sin hurts ***others***, but since it’s God who determines what sin ***is***, ***He’s*** the one our sin offends the ***most***...and ***that*** means...if we’re to be whole, He’s the one whose forgiveness we must, sooner or later, seek.

We can ***ask***...and even ***gain***...the forgiveness of those around us we hurt.

We can attempt to forgive ***ourselves*** for the mistakes we make.

But until we ask ***God*** for forgiveness, there will always be that subtle voice of conviction in our spirits...and let me say...that’s ***not*** because God enjoys watching us suffer.

Just the opposite, actually.

When we feel conviction, we should give thanks!

God presses us with conviction because He wants, above all else, a clear relationship with us. God doesn’t want sin getting in between Him and us. God is out for redemption, and that’s great news!

So God is not only the One who determines what sin is and isn’t, God is also the one behind that conviction we feel that’s intended to move us toward repentance.

And then...thankfully...He’s the one who offers the forgiveness we need, because, like we’ve said, God’s ***nature*** and ***goal*** and ***desire*** is to ***forgive*** us for the sin we’ve committed against Him.

But forgiveness requires our realizing what we’ve done is wrong and then humbling ourselves and asking for God’s forgiveness.

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King David ***knew*** that what He’d ***done*** was ***wrong***:

But notice here...David ***also*** knew that there was ***more*** wrong within him than just what he’d ***done***.

His prayer here confesses...***not*** just ***one***...not even ***several...individual...sins***. His prayer here confesses ***sinfulness***...sinfulness ***even from birth***.

David’s prayer is about the entirety of the ***self***..it’s about a ***whole life*** conditioned by sin from it’s ***very beginning***.

David understands that the problem he was dealing with was not just the eruption of one or two ***spots*** in his otherwise perfect life. [ holds up shirt with spot on it ]

No...David realizes that his problem involves the ***whole garment*** that is ***him***. [ holds up shirt with dirt all over ]

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So, the deliverance he’s asking for is not just pardon from one or two specific wrongs.

David is asking for a change to his ***whole self***.

And this is where the idea of cleansing comes in.

It's not just the one spot that needs removed. David wants the *whole garment*...all that is David...to be cleaned.

And of course it's not really the *outside* so much as it is the *inside*.

Yes, David wants *forgiveness* for what he'd *done*...David wants clean hands.

But he knows the real prize...the greater gift...is to have a clean *heart*, which is what he asks for there in verse 10; he prays, "*Create in me a clean heart, oh God...and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*"

Of course, this is what God loved so much about David.

Many people who pray for help say, "Lord, please change my situation."

But not David. David says, "Lord, please change *me*. Change *me* by making me clean before you...clean on the inside."

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But how does that sort of deep cleaning on the inside happen?

Drinking this won't do it. [ *taps Bottle of Mr. Clean* ] Drinking this will do something, but it won't be good.

Only God can do it...only God can change us at the *heart* level...the *will* level...the  *motive* level. Only God can transform *why* we do what we do, and David knew that.

That's why the first word of David's prayer there is "create." In all of the Old Testament, that verb is only used in relation to God. It's the same word as in Genesis 1, and it means, "to bring into existence what was not there before."

David asks God to create a brand-new condition in his heart.

And then ... the *renewal* David asks for – that's the same sort of thing. To fundamentally change what *is* to what *needs to be*.

David's asking God to give him a new heart – one who's motives are clean and pure...and also a new spirit – one that's steady and faithful to God.

He's asking God to place in Him a will that is open to God, oriented to God and fixed on God ... never wandering or wavering or slipping into sin.

That's what being clean means to David.

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All through Scripture, that which is unclean is apart from God, contrary to God, and running at cross purposes with, God.

David sees uncleanness in his life and he doesn't want it to remain. He wants to be clean ... to be joined with God, in line with God and living in harmony with God in every way.

And that requires a cleansing that is more substantial than just forgiveness, you see?

Forgiveness is part of it, but this is a clean that's deeper.

It's the difference between someone saying, "Oh, hey ... I'm sorry," and someone saying, "Please forgive me for what I did and help me never to do anything like that again."

There is a difference, isn't there?

To be sorry can be thoughtless and mechanical. People can say they're sorry just because they know they should.

But that kind of sorrow will never bring the deep cleansing we all need...that really...we all long for. Mechanical apologies don't soothe the soul, and they will never make us light and fresh and deeply clean within.

Only real repentance before God ... like David demonstrates here ... will do that.

And God knows the difference.

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God is moved to forgive, but not by some mechanical reaction or by successfully completing some religious requirement.

God is moved to forgive by a crushed human spirit...by the sort of brokenness that's content with nothing less than a new heart and a spirit aligned with His will.

That's the sort of repentance that brings the forgiveness that makes us clean...both inside and out.

Feeling new and fresh and clean because God's spirit has cleansed...has deeply changed...our heart.

That's what David wanted, and because of Jesus, you and I can have that today.

This is the very new creation that the Apostle Paul speaks of.

This is the new birth that Jesus talks about, and that He died to make possible.<sup>2</sup>

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Timothy Keller writes that, in order to experience the cleanliness and freedom of forgiveness, we have to honestly repent of our sins, of course, but we also have to have the confidence that God really will forgive us.

Remarkably, David had this.

But on *this* side of Jesus' cross, we can know this even *more clearly* and *confidently*.

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A God who is both just and forgiving requires that a substitutionary sacrifice be made to bear the punishment of the sinner's sin...so the sinner might be reconciled and transformed...re-created.

Jesus was that necessary sacrifice. God the Father sent Him to die in our place...for the sins that we committed, so God's forgiveness of our sins would be entirely just.

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17, John 3:1-16,

David prayed, ***“Cast me not away from your presence,”*** and God did not, but that was because on the cross, Jesus ***was*** cast away from God’s presence.<sup>3</sup>

You see, Jesus got what David deserved.

Jesus cried out, ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”***

so that David didn’t have to ...

and friends, so that none of us have to either.<sup>4</sup>

Because of Jesus, anyone who will truly repent of our sins can have confidence in God’s forgiveness, and anyone who will ask Him to cleanse us at the deepest levels can know that He will.

By His Spirit, we can be clean, and we can rejoice in that certainty!

Jesus Himself said, ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.”***<sup>5</sup>

That’s the certainty of forgiveness.

But then John declares, ***“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”***<sup>6</sup>

That’s the certainty of cleansing.

And that’s why Paul reminds the Roman believers, ***“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”***<sup>7</sup>

Or in the words of the prophet Isaiah, ***“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall become white as snow.”***<sup>8</sup>

Where there were ***sins*** [ holds up shirt #1 ],  
and where there was ***sin*** [ holds up shirt #2 ],  
there will be purity and wholeness and freedom. [ holds up shirt #3 ]

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Will you believe that God will forgive you of your ***sins***?

Will you also believe that God will make you ***clean within***...at the ***deepest level***?

He will do it.

Whatever it is that you need from the Lord this morning...

Forgiveness, cleansing...

Maybe the assurance that you ***are*** forgiven...

Maybe the power to forgive someone else...

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 51:11

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 27:46

<sup>5</sup> John 3:16

<sup>6</sup> 1 John 1:9

<sup>7</sup> Romans 8:1

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 1:18

Whatever it is that you need, would you ask the Lord for that this morning?

Whatever you need, ask Him this morning?

I would invite you to come ... I invite you to come and ask Him here ... just by yourself – you won't be bothered ... just come and pray the prayer of David ... even this morning.

And you will find, as David found, the Lord will not let you down ... He will not let you down.

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**Closing Song:**

**Closing Word and Benediction:**

This is the prayer of David. If you need to pray it, pray it along with me.

“Have mercy on me, O God ...  
Blot out my transgressions ...  
Wash away all my iniquity ...  
Cleanse me from my sin.  
Cleanse me with hyssop, and I'll be clean ...  
Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.  
Blot out all my iniquity ...  
Create in me a clean heart ...  
Renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

Lord, help us to take You at your word ... to know that we can be clean from sins, from the effects of sin ... that we can be clean before You. Give us all that assurance ... all that dare to ask You. Would You drive that truth home to us today. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen

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If you'd like to come and pray, you are welcome. Go if you would.

Thank you for coming to worship.

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