

Psalm 51 – True Repentance

In this Psalm, we are listening to the prayer of a man who truly repented. This is King David. He had seriously sinned, taking another man's wife and pushing that man to die in war (2 Samuel 11). He was a saved man who backslid, but truly repented. Do you know what real repentance is? This psalm gives us a measuring stick to measure ourselves by. Repentance is much more than people think!

1. A repenting sinner's view of himself

David uses three words to describe what he had done. The first is “sin” (v2, 4). This means an offence. It brings guilt. It needs a price to be paid; it needs atonement. We have fallen short of God's holy law and deserve to be punished. God is right (v4), and we are wrong. The second word is “transgression” (v1, 3). This means rebellion. God has said “you shall not”; but we have said “I shall”. Sin is rebellion (1 John 3:4). We have broken God's holy laws. The third word is “iniquity” (v2). Iniquity is perversity; it is moral uncleanness and depravity. It is dirt that needs washing away (v2). This is our condition before God; he sees us as vile and disgusting. Is this your view of yourself? It is in a true repenting sinner. David saw his sin as against God alone (v4) – God is the one who is first and who judges us. Where does this evil come from? It is from an evil nature; a bad tree gives bad fruit (v5). We need a new heart, v10. We cannot change ourselves; we need God to change us.

2. A repenting sinner's salvation

Where could David get salvation? It was not in himself. He was a great man; a powerful king; he had done great deeds for God – but this was not enough. He could not pretend his sin was small. He could not promise to keep God's law; this would not change his fallen nature. Sacrifices (v16) would not take his sin away. Have you understood this? Where can we get salvation? It is a free gift from God alone. It is grace; mercy from his love and compassion (v1). God himself gave the true sacrifice when he gave Jesus to die on the cross. God hates sin more than we can imagine, but is more merciful than we can dream. We must come with nothing but a broken heart (v16); then he will receive us. This is true repentance.

3. A forgiven sinner's privileges

Salvation brings a huge change – you receive a new heart and become a new person (v10). The Spirit of God comes – live inside you and brings you into the very presence of God (v11). Salvation brings great joy (v12). A believer's tongue cannot stop singing praise (v14, 15). Have you seen this in many people? 80% of Kenyans say they are Christians – but do they look like this? They do not. They do not know this joyful salvation because they have never known David's sorrow and repentance over sin. Christianity is not just church-going; it is a glorious new life.

4. A forgiven sinner's service

The final privilege is to become one of God's servants. To serve in the king's household is a great blessing! Before we were vile and forbidden; now we are welcomed. Now, we can worship rightly (v19) and be part of building God's kingdom (v18). We are saved to serve. This is the saved heart's desire. Is it yours?