

MIDWEEK OF LENT 3: STUDENT

THE PENITENTIAL PSALMS: PSALM 51

THEME VERSE

“Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that You have broken rejoice.” (Psalm 51:8)

TEXTS

Psalm 51
 Small Catechism, Confession: *What is Confession?*

INTRODUCTION

In order to understand forgiveness, we must first understand sin. David here confesses and teaches us that all sin is against God, and that in order for God to forgive us, He must first show us our sin for what it is. Then God will cleanse us and make us His own once again.

QUESTIONS

Q1. In order to understand Psalm 51, it is important to understand the context. Take a few minutes and review the story of David and Bathsheba from 2 Samuel 11–12. What are the key elements of this story? What was David's worst sin? How does God show David that he has sinned? How did God forgive David? If God forgave David, why did the child still die?

Q2. Read Psalm 51:1–2. What is mercy? Why does David use the image of washing and cleansing to describe forgiveness? In what sense does sin make us “dirty”?

Q3. Read Psalm 51:3. How does David come to know his transgressions/sins (see Romans 3:20)? How do we come to know our transgressions? Is there any way other than God's Word to learn that we are sinners in need of forgiveness?

Q4. Read Psalm 51:4. Why is all sin ultimately against God? How does this “justify” God's words? When we sin against one another, why is it important to actually own up to what we have done? How does this change our relationship with the other person?

In Luther's Small Catechism, we have a simple explanation of Confession and Absolution as follows: “*What is confession?* Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.”

Q5. Read Psalm 51:5–6. Why does David make a point of his sinful origins? How might this affect our view of the sinfulness of children? What is the “secret heart”?

Q6. Read Psalm 51:7–9. What is hyssop, and why does David refer to it here? Where else do we find it in the Bible (hint: during Jesus' Passion).

How precisely will God wash David, and speak words of joy and gladness to him? When did God break David's bones? What does it mean to say that God “hides His face” and “blots out” iniquities?

hys·sop

1. a small bushy aromatic plant of the mint family, the bitter minty leaves of which are used in cooking and herbal medicine.

2.(in biblical use) a wild shrub of uncertain identity whose twigs were used for sprinkling in ancient Jewish rites of purification.

Q7. Read Psalm 51:10. These words are quite familiar. Where do we know them from? What is a clean heart and a right spirit?

Q8. Read Psalm 51:11. Why would God cast me from His presence, and what does the Holy Spirit have to do with it?

Q9. Read Psalm 51:12. Why is salvation joyful? Should the forgiveness of sins make one happy? Why or why not?

Q10. Read Psalm 51:13–15. Here David speaks of the results of God forgiving his sins. Why does he pray that God would open his lips (v. 15), and what is/was the alternative?

Q11. Read Psalm 51:16–19. David contrasts outward sacrifices with an attitude of humility and repentance (v. 17). How might we be tempted to go through the motions of Confession and Absolution, but miss the very point behind it? Are there ways to guard against false repentance?

CONCLUSION

God loves to show mercy and pity. That is His nature. When we sin, we are refusing to receive God's love, and in turn we are denying God's very nature as loving and kind. Through David we hear how God uses the Law to show us our sin and great need for redemption, and how in the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins, everything is made right once again. Rejoice in God's mercy, for it is for us all!

Psalm 51- Nathan confronted David
Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God

- 1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!
- 3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
- 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment.
- 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
- 6 Behold, you delight in truth in the inward
being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.
- 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- 8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
- 9 Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
- 11 Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.
- 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
- 14 Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your
righteousness.
- 15 O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
- 16 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I
would give it;
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.
- 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will
not despise.
- 18 Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
build up the walls of Jerusalem;
- 19 then will you delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Question 1

2 Samuel 11-12 David and Bathsheba

11 In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

2 It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. 3 And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" 4 So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. 5 And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

6 So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. 7 When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab was doing and how the people were doing and how the war was going. 8 Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." And Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. 9 But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. 10 When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?" 11 Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing." 12 Then David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. 13 And David invited him, and he ate in his presence and drank, so that he made him drunk. And in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

14 In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. 15 In the letter he wrote, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die." 16 And as Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant men. 17 And the men of the city came out and fought with Joab, and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite also died. 18 Then Joab sent and told David all the news about the fighting. 19 And he instructed the messenger, "When you have finished telling all the news about the fighting to the king, 20 then, if the king's anger rises, and if he says to you, 'Why did you go so near the city to fight? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? 21 Who killed Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Did not a woman cast an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died at Thebez? Why did you go so near the wall?' then you shall say, 'Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.'"

22 So the messenger went and came and told David all that Joab had sent him to tell. 23 The messenger said to David, "The men gained an advantage over us and came out against us in the field, but we drove them back to the entrance of the gate. 24 Then the archers shot at your servants from the wall. Some of the king's servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also." 25 David said to the messenger, "Thus shall you say to Joab, 'Do not let this matter displease you, for the sword devours now one and now another. Strengthen your attack against the city and overthrow it.' And encourage him."

26 When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband. 27 And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

Nathan Rebukes David

12 And the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. 2 The rich man had very many flocks and herds, 3 but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his

arms,[a] and it was like a daughter to him. 4 Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." 5 Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, 6 and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

7 Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. 8 And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. 9 Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. 10 Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' 11 Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. 12 For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'" 13 David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. 14 Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord,[b] the child who is born to you shall die." 15 Then Nathan went to his house.

David's Child Dies

And the Lord afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and he became sick. 16 David therefore sought God on behalf of the child. And David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. 17 And the elders of his house stood beside him, to raise him from the ground, but he would not, nor did he eat food with them. 18 On the seventh day the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, "Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us. How then can we say to him the child is dead? He may do himself some harm." 19 But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David understood that the child was dead. And David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" They said, "He is dead." 20 Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. He then went to his own house. And when he asked, they set food before him, and he ate. 21 Then his servants said to him, "What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food." 22 He said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, 'Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' 23 But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."

Solomon's Birth

24 Then David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her, and she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. And the Lord loved him 25 and sent a message by Nathan the prophet. So he called his name Jedidiah,[c] because of the Lord.

Rabbah Is Captured

26 Now Joab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites and took the royal city. 27 And Joab sent messengers to David and said, "I have fought against Rabbah; moreover, I have taken the city of waters. 28 Now then gather the rest of the people together and encamp against the city and take it, lest I take the city and it be called by my name." 29 So David gathered all the people together and went to Rabbah

and fought against it and took it. 30 And he took the crown of their king from his head. The weight of it was a talent[d] of gold, and in it was a precious stone, and it was placed on David's head. And he brought out the spoil of the city, a very great amount. 31 And he brought out the people who were in it and set them to labor with saws and iron picks and iron axes and made them toil at[e] the brick kilns. And thus he did to all the cities of the Ammonites. Then David and all the people returned to Jerusalem.

Question 3:

Romans 3:20

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

2 Samuel 12:7

Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul.

2 Samuel 12:18

On the seventh day the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, "Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us. How then can we say to him the child is dead? He may do himself some harm."

Romans 3:23

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Question 4:

1 John 1:10

If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Question 5:

Luther writes concerning what is translated here as *secret heart*, and is also translated as "hidden part" (NKJV) or "secret place" (NIV):

The inner and hidden part of this wisdom is nothing else than knowing oneself thoroughly, and therefore hating oneself. It is seeking all righteousness not in self but in God, always dissatisfied with oneself and yearning for God, that is, humbly loving God and looking away from self. This inner, unknown righteousness is revealed in all kinds of outward behavior, manner, words, and works, in which the proud remain and harden themselves. Therefore God, who loves reality and truth, hates them, because they love the outward appearance and hypocrisy. (AE 14:169–70)

Question 6:

John 19:29

A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.

1 Kings 4:33

He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish.

Leviticus 14:6

He shall take the live bird with the cedarwood and the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, and dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water.

God washes and speaks words of joy to David by forgiving his sin through Nathan the prophet. See the Small Catechism's definition of Absolution, which describes our sin as forgiven "before God in heaven." God hides His face from our sins by removing them "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12).

Question 8:

Exodus 33:19-20

19 And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. 20 But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."

1 Samuel 6:20

Then the men of Beth-shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God? And to whom shall he go up away from us?"

Matthew 5:8

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Malachi 3:2

But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.

Matthew 3:11

"I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

1 Peter 1:6-7

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Question 11:

Remember again those words from the catechism for this week, “not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.”

Luke 15:7 & 10

7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

How Christians should be taught to confess

What is Confession?

Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.

What sins should we confess?

Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even those we are not aware of, as we do in the Lord's Prayer; but before the pastor we should confess only those sins which we know and feel in our hearts.

Which are these?

Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm?