

God's mercy to the sinner

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Preacher: Prof E.Donnelly

[0 : 00] Our text this evening is found in the 51st Psalm, the first two verses of the Psalm.

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness, according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions, wash me throughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

The Lord Jesus Christ once gave the explanation why so many people do not come to him for life, when he said, they that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

Men and women, he said, have no real sense of need. They do not understand what their sinfulness means.

They do not appreciate how terrible their plight and condition before a holy and almighty God.

[1 : 34] And until they are awakened to their sense of need, they will see no value in the Saviour, no beauty in him.

Why should a man who thinks he is healthy seek the service of a physician? And men and women gripped in the deadly anesthesia of sin do not understand their plight.

This evening, we want to seek from the word of God to understand what it means to be a sinner.

We are going to go into a room in the royal palace at Jerusalem, where a man sits at a table writing. His eyes are red with weeping.

His cheeks are wet with tears. He is not writing. He is not writing to the family of the murdered Uriah.

[3 : 00] He is not writing to Bathsheba to tell her that their child will die. No. He is writing to God.

That man is King David. These are the words which he wrote. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness.

We are going to stand with David this evening. Not out of idle curiosity. For this is a sacred and private moment in this man's life.

A moment of brokenness. Of conviction. Of heart searching in the presence of his God.

My friends, we want to stand there so that we too may understand with him what it means to be a sinner. And I trust by God's grace that we may go further and understand what it means to be a forgiven sinner.

[4 : 24] A saved sinner. A sinner whose transgressions have been forgiven and whose sin covered. We're going to look in these verses first of all at the evidences of sin.

And secondly at the effects of sin. First then let us consider the evidences of sin.

As David sets them out here. and he uses three common words to describe his sin. My transgressions, mine iniquity, and my sin.

And he doesn't just use these words for effect. He doesn't multiply words for the sake of it. Each one of these words has a precise and definite meaning.

It shows us something about sin. and their order is also important. Let us consider them together.

[5 : 48] David first of all describes his sin as my transgressions. My transgressions.

That is a very strong word. it means a breaking loose. A tearing away. It is a word which is used of deliberate rebellion against a superior.

We find that word used for example in 1st Kings 12 and verse 19. So Israel rebelled or transgressed against the house of David to this day.

He was their lawful king. Their God appointed ruler. But they broke away from his yoke. They rejected his authority.

They cast it off. They rebelled. They transgressed against him. A breaking loose. A throwing off of restraint.

[7 : 05] The same word is used of an angry teenager throwing off the loving arms of a parent.

The teenager is set perhaps on a course of action. Unwise or wicked. His father or mother tries to restrain him but he bursts their arms aside and will have none of their restraint.

We find the word used at the beginning of Isaiah the second verse of the book where the Lord says I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled or transgressed against me.

A stronger wiser power has imposed limits and restraints but the transgressor has burst through these.

He has cast them aside. And so David as he thinks of his sin his wrongdoing identifies it first of all as transgression.

[8 : 26] He has burst restraints. He has broken the seventh commandment. Thou shalt not commit adultery.

That was a restraint upon him but he burst it. Thou shalt not kill. That was another restraint upon him but he burst it.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor. Another restraint upon him and he burst it. He acted against the restraints of his conscience.

He acted against the obligations he owed to a faithful servant. He acted against the sanctity of the home and the good of the nation.

He rejected God's authority and followed his own will. My transgressions must must we not say also that we too are transgressors.

[9 : 46] For the Lord God has placed restraints upon us. And it may be that we have broken or are in the process of bursting these restraints or wanting to do so.

The restraint of a godly upbringing perhaps. Are there some here who feel that an unwelcome and constricting force from which they would like to be free.

The restraints of the word of God in its obligations and duties laid upon our hearts and known to many of us from childhood.

The restraints of conscience and time and again haven't we disregarded those restraints? Haven't we rebelled against God?

Haven't we deliberately and consciously chosen to do what we knew clearly to be wrong? These are our transgressions.

[11 : 10] But then in the second place David speaks of mine iniquity. Mine iniquity. And this word means that which is crooked, twisted and perverse.

He begins by thinking of his actions but now he's going deeper into his mind, into his heart, into his thought life.

That aspect which other men cannot see but which he sees and which God sees. David says, not only are my actions wrong, but when I look within I see perverseness, wickedness, deviousness, dishonesty and deceit.

My thoughts and motives are twisted and unclean. My problem is not only the things I do, it is the thoughts which I entertain within my mind.

I am not open and clean and honest as men might have thought. I am a man of iniquity.

[12 : 44] I remember once visiting a beautiful English country home and as we went through it we were struck by the beauty and the grandeur of the public rooms.

Tall windows, polished furniture, gleaming silver, all was spacious and elegant, clean and beautiful. And then later on in our tour we visited the cellars of that house and what a different story that was. Cobwebs brushed our faces there were smells of uncleanness, evidence of vermin, those cellars so little visited, untenanted, empty and dark.

Upstairs cleanness and beauty, spaciousness and elegance. Down below uncleanness shame. shame. We've all got public rooms in our personalities in which we welcome our friends.

[14 : 08] And those rooms are clean and comely. We meet our family there, our fellow Christians, our fellow worshippers.

believers. It's how they know us. But my friends, isn't it true to say that there are dark rooms in our personalities where only we visit?

Places of uncleanness where pride and malice and lust and self reign where there is darkness and dirt.

Don't sometimes in our minds we shut out the world and we love to go to those rooms into that iniquity and into that darkness.

Iniquity, inner perversity, twistedness, my iniquity. And then thirdly David says my sin, my sin.

[15 : 27] This word means to miss the target. In Judges chapter 20 verse 16 we read among all this people there were 700 chosen men left handed.

everyone could sling stones at a hairbreadth and not miss. And that word miss is the word which David uses here.

To miss the mark. To miss the target. And here you see he's coming to a deeper understanding of his sinfulness before God.

He began with his acts of open rebellion. he then went on to his thought life. To his heart. To the uncleanness that was there.

But now he's coming deeper. He says even at my best, even at my best, where there may be no transgression, where there may be no iniquity, I still fall short.

[16 : 43] I do not serve God as I should. I am not what I might be. The best prayer I ever uttered falls short.

The best thing I ever did falls short. The greatest piece of service I ever performed for my God has the marks of uncleanness upon it.

He starts by confessing himself at his worst. He ends by seeking forgiveness for himself at his best. Is that not searching? we might be tempted perhaps to say, well, there aren't any great transgressions in my life.

We'd be wrong to say that. But we might be tempted to say that. We might even go further and say, inside my heart, I am sincere and upright.

[17 : 57] but even if that were the case, what about sin? What about falling short?

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength.

Has any of us ever done that for one instant of our earthly existence? Never. Never.

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. But never done it. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

God. And in everything we do, even at our best, our highest, our holiest, we must still be aware that we have come short, that we have failed miserably to reach perfect obedience.

[19 : 16] This word sin is the mesh of the net which will catch us all. My friends, do you realize that these words of David describe you?

Does your heart agree with David? Can you say tonight, my transgressions, my anything?

My sin. Do you feel David's grief and David's shame? For this is what our sin is.

We are rebels. We are fakes. We are failures. the evidences of sin.

Let's look secondly at the effects of sin. Otherwise we might not appreciate what a serious matter it is.

[20 : 34] We might say very well, I am a transgressor. I have committed iniquity and I have fallen short, but does it matter? But here again in our text David tells us three effects of sin.

He says in the first place that sin is a debt which must be cancelled. Blot out my transgressions. Blot them out. This word was used for removing writing from a page. You remember how Moses prayed to God, Blot me out, I pray thee, of thy book which thou hast written.

The psalmist sang concerning his enemies, out of the book of life, let them be raised and blotted quite. And David when he says to God, blot out my transgressions, sees his sin as a record of debt, a record of obligation, mounting up, clamoring for payment to God.

He is a debtor. man. He sees written before his eyes the record of every sin and wrongdoing and failure, glaring out and calling for his condemnation.

[22 : 12] He sees the account book of God set before his eyes, and there on the page, the record of his sins.

And we are in debt to our God. We owe him every second, every thought, every word, every action. We can never hope to repay even the smallest trifle. You remember the folly of that man in the parable, owing well over a million pounds, who said to his master, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

Never could he do it. And the sinner is a debtor before God. David secondly sees sin as dirt to be washed away.

Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity. Dirt to be washed away. This word wash means to wash by rubbing or beating.

[23 : 40] it's a special word which was used for the removal of ingrained dirt. Perhaps by beating the cloth against a stone in running water.

And when David describes his sin, he describes it in this way, not as something superficial, not as something easily removed, but as an integral part of his being and nature.

His very person is befouled with sin. That's why he goes on to say, behold, I in iniquity was formed the womb within.

My mother also me conceived in guiltiness and sin. Some people, you see, have thought that in those words, David was excusing himself.

But David was condemning himself. He was saying, not only have I done this awful thing, Lord, but this is what I am.

[25 : 03] This action is an index of my nature and my being. Not only have I committed sin, but I am a sinner.

I was conceived a sinner. I was born a sinner. My very being and nature is stained and grined and polluted by this sin.

The men of the world say that man is dirty on top but clean underneath. The Bible says, the further down you go, the more ingrained the stain and uncleanness of sin.

Sin is dirt to be washed away. And thirdly, sin is disease which needs to be healed.

Cleanse me from my sin. And that is a leper's word. The most dreaded disease.

[26 : 19] That awful calamity which when it struck a man left him isolated, forsaken, deformed, and doomed to die.

And this is the word which is used again and again in the Old Testament of the cleansing of the leper. David again, you see, is going deeper.

He begins by saying I have incurred debt before God. And then he says, no, it's worse than that.

My very being is unclean before God. And then he says, no, even deeper. I am smitten with a foul, ugly, loathsome disease that separates, isolates, and dooms me.

My sin makes me alone. my dear friends, that we all could realize that this is what it means to be a sinner.

[27 : 55] we are rebels against God. We are hypocrites.

We are failures. we are dead. We are dirty.

We are diseased. This is what we are by nature. The evidences on the effects of sin.

But our text doesn't stop here. And the gospel, thank God, doesn't stop here. For this murderous adulterer crawls into the presence of the holy Lord God.

This dirty, diseased debtor, this rebel, this fake and this failure. He stands before that radiant almighty spirit.

[29 : 23] The one before whom the angels cover their faces crying holy, holy, holy.

The sinner convicted of sin in the presence of his God. And what word is upon his lips?

Have mercy upon me, O God. Have mercy. That's all he can say.

God, God, that's all anyone can say. The Republican standing afar off would not lift so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

have mercy oh God my friends that's all any of us can say no matter how long we live and no matter how far we may progress in the Christian life we will never never go beyond that prayer have mercy upon me oh God and the great Baptist missionary William Carey once thought he was dying he asked that these words be preached at his funeral service have mercy upon me oh God the sinner's prayer and he explains it blot out my transgressions wash me freely from my iniquity cleanse me from my sin cancel my debt purify my uncleanness heal my sickness have mercy oh God he can't do it he can't pay his debt he can't cleanse himself he can't heal himself and neither can we but as David says do thou with it sprinkle me

[32 : 15] I shall be cleansed so and here he is and here we are aware of sin and asking for mercy I supposing God had said to David why should I show you mercy you know what you are you've admitted it you've confessed it transgression iniquity and sin you know my law you're aware of my holiness why should I show you mercy can you give me a reason and David would say yes Lord

I can give you a reason a reason that you will hear a reason that you cannot and will not refuse have mercy on me oh God according to thy loving kindness according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies here says David is the reason I ask for mercy that reason isn't based on anything I have done it's not based on anything I am or anything I deserve that reason Lord God is based on

you and who you are and what you have done and what you have promised and what you have shown yourself to be

David here takes two of the greatest and grandest words in the Bible and he holds them up to God as the reason why he should be forgiven God's loving kindness his steadfast covenant faithfulness the God who has said I will be your God and you will be my people and you will be my people the God who has said I will forgive your iniquities and your sins I will remember no more Lord you are a God of loving kindness a God who keeps to your pledged word and your covenant people a God who is rich in mercy the Lord our God is mercy and he is gracious long suffering and slow to wrath in mercy plenteous and my friends this convicted broken man overwhelmed as he was by the greatness of his sin and shudderingly aware of the blinding holiness of the God against whom he had transgressed nevertheless could pray for mercy with confidence and faith for he was holding before God his own being his own character his own covenant his own promise his loving kindness and his compassion and my friends we must follow David we must come tonight to God we must seek by his grace to look to him and to confess to him our transgressions and our iniquity and our sin and to ask him for mercy what reason do we give we give exactly the same reason which David did exactly the same according unto thy loving kindness according unto the multitude of thy tender mercy except that God's loving kindness has been revealed in human flesh and God's tender mercy has been made known in the person of his son

Christ is the loving kindness of God Christ the saviour is God's tender mercy he is the reason we can ask for mercy he is the only reason weren't we singing it he only my salvation is my strong rock is he he only is my sure defense and this is the name which the father cannot and will not refuse in my master's name

I would urge you to come to God tonight through Christ to plead with the Lord Jesus to blot out to wash away to heal he has never refused a seeking soul shortly after David wrote the psalm he wrote another one you know it oh blessed is the man to whom is freely pardoned all the transgression he has done whose sin is covered

[39 : 56] I thereupon have unto thee my sin acknowledged likewise mine iniquity I have not covered I said I will confess unto the Lord my trespasses and of my sin thou freely didst forgive the iniquity we can receive God's forgiveness even for my sins even for your sins no matter how great they be though they be a scarlet if we can pray and mean these words have mercy upon me oh God blot out my transgressions wash me from mine iniquity cleanse me from my sin for Jesus sake amen let us pray

O Lord thou who art infinitely holy of purer eyes than to behold iniquity we come before thee conscious of our transgression of our iniquity of our sin grant us O God to see it afresh pierce our consciences say unto us thou art the man O Lord we pray that these may not be empty words or ideas but that we may be given within our hearts to feel the pain and shame and grief of our wrongdoing our Father how many have been the loving restraints with which thou hast surrounded us in thy mercy yet how often and how wantonly we have broken we have broken them how different

O Lord the face we present to the world and to our fellow men from that which is within truly Father often we are as whited sepulchers Lord how many and how great our failures even in the holiest things we leave the mark of unclean hands O Lord smite us we pray with thy rod of conviction show unto us through thy word our sinfulness our lostness our uncleanness and despair forbid O God that we should say I am rich and increased with goods and of need of nothing forbid O Lord that we should leave this place blinded by the God of this world to our true condition

O Lord God show us ourselves but Father we pray that also we may be given to see the Saviour that we may be given faith to look unto him who said him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out thy sins which are many are forgiven go in peace and Lord we pray that it may be granted to us tonight to come afresh or for the first time to the Saviour of lost and needy sinners and to throw ourselves upon Christ who alone is our salvation to receive and rest upon him alone as he is offered to us in the gospel and to know thy cleansing and thy healing and thy peace father there is nothing in ourselves which we can plead our mouths are shut we are silenced we look to thee we look to thy loving kindness and thy tender mercy because thou art the God of salvation who didst so love the world as to give thine only begotten son we therefore

Lord have hope that we shall not perish but have everlasting life in him grant that we pray unto thy chosen to thee shall be the praise and the glory in our redeemer's name and for his sake amen