



The Trinity Pulpit



Soul Confessions

Psalm 51:1-12

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As a young man, he had never been at a loss for words when speaking to and of his God. His job, tending sheep, left him alone for hours and sometimes several nights and days, and he found solace talking to God as he tended the sheep of his father. He not only spent time in conversation with God, but he found it easy to write songs of praise to God. His conversation with God was ever present and a natural part of his life. Whether singing or praying, conversation with God was something that was part of his life.

It was not only conversation that came easy to David; he seemed to have no question at all in believing in the power of God. Whenever he was faced with danger, like a bear or a lion that might threaten his sheep, he knew he would be victorious. As a young boy, he had defeated the great Philistine giant, Goliath. Goliath had taunted the army of God and God's king, Saul, but no one would go and fight him. Yet David, a young boy unable to even wear the armor of a soldier, stood on the battlefield that day and with his own weapon of a slingshot and a smooth pebble, he brought down the great Goliath. It was one of the great moments in Israelite history to see how the boy, David, could defeat the great champion, Goliath. So, we see David never seemed to doubt the power of God in his life.

David also trusted God's protection. Whether it was when jealous King Saul was chasing him and trying to kill him, or in the various battles when his enemies were out to get him and encamped around him, David was sure that in the end God would not forsake him. He believed God would deliver him so he could sing praises to God. David never doubted God's ultimate protection.

David also never doubted God's plan for his life. He had been anointed as a young boy to be the King of Israel, but years passed without him coming to the throne. A lesser man would have given up on such a dream and decided that Samuel had been forsaken, but not David. David seemed to know in the depths of his heart that, no matter how long it might take and no matter how hard the road

might be God's plan for his life would be fulfilled. David never doubted his call and his anointing as king.

No wonder David is called "a man after God's own heart." Here was a man who, since he was a child, had found conversation with God to be something that came with ease, believed in God's power in his life, and trusted God's protection in his life. David was a man who believed God's plan for his life.

That is why when we find the words of Psalm 51 we are surprised. This cannot be a prayer of a man who trusted, spoke to, and believed in God, and was sure of God's promise. What had happened to David that would cause him to need to utter such a prayer?

It is simple. His problem is the one with which we all struggle: sin. David had sinned and his sin had created a chasm between him and God. Where there was once conversation, there was now silence. Where there had been trust, there was now fear. Where there had been certainty of God's blessing, there was now the certainty of God's judgment. Everything had changed and everything needed to be restored, so we have David's soul confession in Psalm 51.

We all remember David's great sin. According to 2 Samuel 11, it happened in the spring, at a time, according to our text, that kings go off to war. At a time when kings go off to war, David sent his general in his stead. He sent his army and his officers, but he did not go himself; he stayed in Jerusalem. When David should have been off fighting his own war because that was what warrior kings did, David stayed behind. David had changed. I am sure he used to look forward to leading his army, but David stayed this time. One evening, while David was walking around on the roof of his palace, he noticed a woman bathing. Instead of turning and looking away, David kept looking; so long, in fact, that his look became lust. David was so overcome by

lust that he sent for her and slept with her. There are many things wrong with this story, but one of the most grievous was that Bathsheba was the wife of one of his soldiers, Uriah. That one night of lust turned into a lifetime of trouble: Bathsheba became pregnant and everyone knew that the king had committed adultery. So, David hatched a scheme to cover his sin.

David sent for his servant-soldier, Uriah, and had him return from the war, so that Uriah might sleep with his wife, thus causing everyone to think the child belonged to Uriah. The only problem with David's scheme was that Uriah was a man of great character and loyalty. He came home, but he was so committed to his king that he stayed at the palace gate instead of going to Bathsheba. David asked "Why have you not gone home after coming from such a distance?" Uriah said "The army of God and the ark of God are dwelling in a tent. How can I go home, eat, drink, and be with my wife?" So, David went to Plan B. Plan B, according to Scripture, was to invite Uriah to stay and dine in the palace. The next day David invited Uriah to eat and drink with him; he got Uriah drunk, thinking a drunken Uriah would go to his wife, Bathsheba, but he did not. Instead, he remained on a mat at the palace.

David, frustrated with Uriah, enacted Plan C: to take care of Uriah once and for all. So, he sent Uriah back to the war and gave Joab orders to put Uriah at the fiercest part of the battle, so that when they fought Uriah would die. Therefore, Uriah was put at the very worst part of the battle and was killed. Joab, upset that Uriah had died, sent word to David. David responded "The sword devours one as well as another." In other words he said "*Que sera sera*. Someone had to die. Don't worry about it, Joab." When Bathsheba heard of Uriah's death, she mourned. When the proper time of mourning was completed, David sent for her, she became his wife, and bore him a son.

David, the one who had once conversed with and trusted in God, had fallen prey to sin. Now, his sin was growing and taking root in his soul. He had not only committed adultery – essentially murder – but he had covered it up and done so without any compassion for Uriah or guilt for what he had done. 2 Samuel 11 ends with these words "But the thing David had done displeased the Lord."

David thought he had gotten away with his sin and no one would ever know what he had done. But Nathan the prophet knew. Nathan was called by God to come into the very presence of the king and accuse him of adultery and murder. So, Nathan began with a story about a man who had many sheep and cattle, but he still had to have one poor man's only little lamb. When a traveler was in need of some food, instead of taking one of his many cattle or sheep, the rich man took the one little lamb

from the poor man. When David heard this he was angry. In his own self-righteousness he said "The one who did such a thing deserves to die and pay four lambs for what he has done." Then Nathan looked at David and said "You are that man."

In that moment David's sin became public; David knew that his sin was not only before him but before others as well. In that moment David's sin came full circle to the consequences sin brings; David is left broken and mourning the death of the child that Bathsheba would bear.

That is the picture of David in Psalm 51. Gone is the man of confidence. Gone is the man of conversation with and trust in God. David had been reduced to a man who was paying the consequences personally and in his family for his sin. What was he to do? What could ever restore that which he once possessed with God? The answer is confession. It is David's soul confession in Psalm 51 that becomes his hope again. It would be his confession that restored joy and the certainty of God's goodness in his life.

David had arrived at a place in his life at which we all arrive. After we have rationalized, denied, and covered up our sin, finally, we come to a place where we can stand to look at it no longer, and the only thing that gives us hope is confession.

In David's confession, I think we find four things that confession can bring to our lives. Let me briefly share with you four things confession does for us.

First, confession creates conversation. As I mentioned before, David had been a man who enjoyed and loved conversation with his God. However, in the process of committing and trying to cover his sin, we do not find one time that David is mentioned as praying to God. Instead, we find David scheming and planning from his own ability. David's next time of prayer is mentioned only after Nathan had confronted him. Then, he is found praying and fasting for the life of his son.

Confession creates our lost conversation with God. The first thing we note is that the whole prayer was an attempt to create conversation with God. David was not satisfied with simply speaking his prayer; he longed for God to speak to him. In verse 8 he cried "Let me hear joy and gladness." In verse 15 he cried "Open my lips and my mouth and I will declare your praise."

In Psalm 32 David offered another prayer about conversation:

When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;

my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD’ — and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

When we live with un-confessed sin, the direct result is our conversation with God comes to a halt. We tend to find less time for prayer. We tend to want to spend less time thinking about God and going to God. We simply do not want to be aware of the presence of God, because that presence reminds us of our sin. David discovered that when he confessed his sin it created the lost conversation of prayer.

The second thing confession can do in our lives is restore our relationship. There is really only one thing that separates us from God: our un-confessed sin. Over and over again, the Bible teaches us that it is our sin — our sin alone — that separates us from God. Before we come to salvation, our sinful nature is what separates us from God and, without Christ, can separate us now and for eternity. Yet after we become Christians, we discover that our sin separates us in the sense of our fellowship with God. When we come to Christ, we always will have a relationship with God and nothing will separate us from God; however, our choice to sin can separate us in fellowship. Simply meaning when we are living lives filled with un-confessed sin, our relationship with God suffers.

David realized this, so his prayer was that his sin would no longer rob him of the fellowship of his relationship with God. What did David pray for? He prayed he would once again enjoy the feeling of knowing forgiveness: “Cleanse me and I will be clean, wash me and I will be whiter than snow.” He longed for the experience of joy and gladness. He longed to have the weight of guilt that crushed his bones be lifted. He prayed for a renewed spirit and the joy of the salvation of God.

Many of us live with the knowledge of our salvation through Jesus Christ, but we have lost its joy. The guilt we carry from un-confessed sin weights us down and robs us of the fellowship that we need and for which God longs. Confession restores the fellowship of our relationship with God. Confession releases forgiveness, joy and gladness.

The third truth that David’s soul confession reminds us of is that confession opens opportunities. Notice what David wrote “Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will turn back to you.”

David understood that before he could share with others the salvation of the Lord he had to experience it for himself. David understood that as long as his un-confessed sin remained in his life, God could not use him for his glory. Confession opens opportunities for us to be used by God.

God cannot use a person who is unwilling to confess his own sin. Now, that does not mean that God does not use sinners; in fact, that is all God uses. What it means is that as long as we rationalize our sin, try to cover our sin, or deny our sin, we are handicapping what God can do with our lives. David tells us that what God desires is not our offerings and our sacrifices but a contrite and broken spirit and heart.

David is reminding us that we can spend our time in devotion through worship, deeds and good intentions. David could have brought sacrifice after sacrifice and gone to worship over and over again, but what released God’s opportunities again in David’s life was a broken and contrite heart. It was a change of heart which came through confession that opened the opportunities of God in David’s life.

Do you ever wonder what God has in store for you? Do you ever wonder what God could do with your life if you were giving yourself totally to him? Do you ever wonder what opportunities God has for you in the days ahead? Please understand that without confession some of those opportunities might never come, simply because God needs servants whose hearts desire God most of all. Confession opens opportunities in our lives.

Finally, and I think most importantly, confession releases us from self-righteousness. Let me tell you what I mean. David came to the conclusion that what he needed was not to do better but to seek forgiveness; he needed God’s kindness and love to be restored. He came to the conclusion that there was nothing he could do to make the situation better. That is why he concluded “Against you and you only have I sinned.” David knew that what would restore his life was not



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doing better; it would be confession that would free him from himself.

Most of us want to live lives that open up God's possibilities. We want to know the fellowship of our relationship with God. We desire to be in conversation with God, yet we struggle with the guilt of not being able to do what we believe God requires. We have determined that the only way to finally be pleasing to God is to find some way to do right. Most of us choose self-discipline or self-righteousness as our way to please God. We decide we are going to do what is right. We are going to obey God, and so we decide we are not going to do this anymore; instead, we are going to do this. Then, we set about our day trying to do what is right and not do what is wrong; at the end of the day, we calculate the choices we made and we try to figure out if we have had a successful day being a Christian. We keep score, and when we are on the losing end, we become discouraged and frustrated. Some of us are so frustrated with our inability not to sin that we are ready to just give up, while some of us may have already given up. We decide this is the way we are and we will never change.

In the book, *Blue Like Jazz*, Donald Miller tells the story of his own struggle with self-discipline instead of grace. His faith began with warm feelings, like that of a romance between lovers, but it soon became stale and cold, like taking a test and always failing. Miller shares in his book:

I found myself trying to love the right things without God's help and it was impossible. I tried to go one week and not have a negative thought about anyone and found that I had negative thoughts about everyone. I thought I could make myself think the right things and do good things but I could not. I thought the answer was self discipline but self discipline only led to guilt and I would try and start again... it was very dehumanizing.

Then later, after an experience with grace, Miller says:

Self-discipline will never make us feel righteous or clean: accepting God's love will. The ability to accept God's unconditional grace and ferocious love is all the fuel we need to obey. Accepting God's kindness and free love is something the devil does not want us to do. If we hear in our inner ear a voice saying we are failures, we are losers, we will never amount to anything, this is the voice of Satan trying to convince the bride of Christ that the groom does not love her. That is not the voice of God. God woos us with kindness. He changes our character with the passion of his love.

Miller closes this chapter by saying "Most of us think of the love between Jesus and the church as like Romeo and Juliet, but it is more like Lucentio's pursuit of Bianca in the *Taming of the Shrew*. The groom endears the belligerent bride with kindness, patience and love. Our behavior will not be changed with self-discipline, but fall in love with Jesus, and a human will accomplish what he never knew was possible."¹

Jesus said "I have come to give you good news. I have come to free you from the endless cycle of self-righteousness that leads to failure, guilt and frustration." Confession is the key. Confession releases us from the never-ending cycle of guilt and frustration that self-righteousness brings.

On this last Sunday of Lent before we enter Holy Week, I want to consider David's soul confessions. He reminds us that confession creates a lost conversation with God. Confession restores the fellowship of our relationship. Confession opens opportunities. Confession releases us from self righteousness.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation... It begins with confession. ❀

¹Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality* (Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2003).

