

KING DAVID'S REPENTANCE.

– *PSALM 51:1-17.* – *OCTOBER 18.* –

Golden Text. – "Create in me a clean heart, O God."

PROSPERITY did not work to King David's personal advantage. After years of phenomenal success under the Lord's blessing, when his kingdom was mighty and his name honorable, and the necessity for his personal participation in wars was passed, and his heart had begun to gravitate towards earthly pleasures and was less zealous for the Lord and the Law than at first, the king fell into very grievous sins, which appear all the more black in contrast with the high moral character shown by him in his earlier life, when he was the man after God's own heart. The story of his sins, how he became enamored of Bathsheba and committed adultery with her, and subsequently, to shield himself, caused her husband Uriah to be placed in the forefront of the battle that he might be killed by the enemy, involving the loss of several other lives as well, is told in the Scriptures in a most straightforward manner, without the slightest effort to condone the king's wrong-doing. No excuses are offered in connection with the account; the full weight of these awful crimes is laid directly on the king's head. Whatever excuses may be offered on his behalf must come from the reader of the account. We may suggest some thoughts along this line: In that day the kings of the world exercised a despotic authority, and it was a theory among the people that the king could do no wrong – that whatever he pleased to do was proper to him because of his high position as the head and ruler of the nation. We could in no sense of the word agree with such a thought. Nevertheless we can reasonably suppose that a sentiment so general would have more or less influence upon the mind of the king. He who respected Saul's life, because he was the Lord's anointed, may have to some extent fallen into the misconception that his own anointing by the Lord relieved

him in some degree from the responsibilities resting upon others of his nation.

For about two years after these crimes were committed the king sought to stifle his conscience, and to consider that he was only using kingly liberties in what he had done. Nevertheless his conscience smote him, and he felt an alienation from God and a condemnation under his law such as he would not have felt had he been of a different stamp of character. God was not hasty in reproofing him, either. He allowed him to have a full taste of heart bitterness – allowed him to feel the darkness of soul, absence of joy, resulting from the cloud which had come between him and the Lord. It was at the appropriate time, after David had passed through secret mournings and travailings of the soul, that the Lord sent him a reproof through Nathan the prophet to bring the whole matter clearly before his mind. Nathan, under the figure of a parable, excited the king's sympathies and declaration of a very severe judgment – a death sentence – against the person offending, and then the Prophet brought home to him the lesson saying, "Thou art the man!"

King David, we are to remember, did not belong to the spiritual house of sons, and hence had a far less clear view of such matters than that which would properly [R3254 : page 381] belong to every member of the house of sons, begotten of the spirit and "taught of God." We are not, therefore, to expect to draw a lesson to ourselves along similar lines. Rather we of the spiritual house, under the clearer conceptions of the divine will, are to remember the higher interpretation of adultery and murder set forth in the New Testament: that whoever desires adultery, and is merely restrained from it by outward circumstances or fears, is really an adulterer in his heart (Matt. 5:28); that he that is angry with his brother, he who hates his brother, is a murderer – because the spirit of anger is that which, unrestrained, would lead to murder (Matt. 5:22); and that the person who covets the things of another and is merely restrained from taking them for lack of opportunity or fear of consequence, is at heart a thief.

If these principles be applied by the New Creation in the examination of their hearts, it is entirely probable that some of the "house of sons" today may find themselves very near the plane of King David as respects sin, and so viewing matters they will exercise proportionately greater compassion in their judgment of the royal transgressor. Such, too, will find great consolation in the Lord's compassion, provided they are exercised in respect to their offences as David was concerning his. "There is compassion with thee that thou mightest be feared," is the prophet's expression. If God were wanting in compassion, as are many of our fellow creatures, there would be nothing to hope for under such circumstances. It is when we realize that there is forgiveness with the Lord for all who are penitent at heart, and who, therefore, give evidence that their sins are not wilful, but rather of the weakness of heredity and under the pressure of blinding temptations, that we are moved to repentance by a hope for better things.

The 51st Psalm is generally recognized as being the one in which the Psalmist expresses to God his contrition for his sins, and the fact that it is dedicated to the Chief Musician implies that it was the king's intention that it, in common with other of the Psalms, should be chanted in the Tabernacle services, for which he had set apart a large number of singers. We thus perceive that if the sin was flagrant and gross, the atonement which the king endeavored to make was a most public one. Probably many of the nation had felt more or less of the king's condemnation, and its influence must have been very injurious; and now in his public view of it as sin, and his prayer for divine forgiveness, the king would undo so far as possible not only the injury which he had inflicted upon his own conscience, and which as a cloud hung between the Lord and him, but he would undo also the evil influences as respects the conscience of the nation – on the subjects of adultery and murder.

Here again we see why David was described as a man after God's own heart. His sins were not pleasing to God – quite the reverse; but

the after appreciation of the enormity of the sins and the hearty repentance therefor to the Lord, and the desire to be cleansed from every evil way, were pleasing to the Lord. Here we have an illustration of how all things may work together for good to those who love God. By reason of his heart-loyalty to the Lord, and the principles of righteousness, even these terrible sins resulted in bringing a great blessing to David's own heart – humbling him – giving him an appreciation of his weakness and littleness, and of his need to abide close to the Lord, if he would have the Lord's fellowship and compassion and be safe from the temptations of his own fallen flesh. So, too, with the New Creation. How many of them have realized profitable lessons and blessings out of some of their stumblings – not that the stumblings were good nor of the Lord, but that the Lord was able to overrule such circumstances for good to those who are of the proper mind – rightly exercised by them to repentance and reformation.

The first three verses of the Psalm express David's appreciation of his sin and his trust in the Lord, without any attempt to apologize for his shortcomings. He trusted to the Lord to make whatever allowances could be made and merely appealed to his great "loving-kindness." In calling to mind the multitude of God's tender mercies in the past, he expressed faith and trust that in some way the Lord could blot out these grievous transgressions and forgive them. The Lord had not yet clearly defined the way in which he could be just and yet be the justifier of sinners. Only vaguely through the shadows of the Day of Atonement sacrifices had he intimated that he had some way of his own by which in due time the guilty but repentant ones might be cleansed. David grasped the thought of mercy as understood in the types and shadows of the Law, and much more may we of the house of sons grasp the thought of our Father's forgiveness when we see that it is exercised towards us by the Lord Jesus Christ, who already has given himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, and whose sacrifice has been accepted of the Father, – as manifested by our Lord's resurrection from the dead, and by the descent of the holy Spirit

at Pentecost. If, therefore, David could trust the Lord for loving-kindness and tender mercies and forgiveness of sins, the members of the house of sons should be able to exercise full faith in the divine character and plan of salvation from sin.

The fourth verse would seem to ignore the fact that wrong-doing had been done to fellow-creatures, but we may preferably understand it to mean that while this wrong to fellow-creatures was recognized by the king, **[R3254 : page 382]** he recognized a still higher responsibility to God, whose laws he had broken and whose kingly office, typifying that of the Christ, he had dishonored. Hence, in contrast between what man might think of his crime as against man and his own still higher consciousness of his sin as against the Lord, the latter seemed so much greater as to practically obscure the former. The greater sin as against the Almighty quite overshadows the wrongs to humanity. David declares his recognition of the fact that God is the great Judge, and that whatever his judgment would be he knew in advance that it would be right.

In the fifth verse he introduces an extenuating thought, as though reminding the Lord that he was born in sin and therefore that perfection was not possible for him. But he does not use this fact as a screen behind which to hide his own responsibilities. Free to will, though a sinner by nature, he was necessarily responsible for yielding as he did to temptation, but he was confident that the Lord would give him the benefit of every mitigating circumstance.

It will be noted that David expected punishment from the Lord for his sins, and was here expressing his confidence that the Lord would send no punishment which would not be reasonable and within the limits of justice. What he was praying for in this Psalm was not a remission of proper punishment, but rather for the cleansing of his heart in the sight of the Lord and for his restoration to the divine favor. As a matter of fact we find that the Lord did send a severe punishment upon the king, and that he restored the sinner to his favor, granting

him to experience again the joys of his salvation. According to the sentiments of other kings of his time, evidently acquiesced in by the people of Israel, the king had taken an extremely moderate course in sin, in that he had not directly taken the life of Uriah but merely connived at his death in battle; but the king appreciated the fact that God was looking deeper than this and desired truth – righteousness in the inward parts – in the heart. Outward crime and a crime allowed in the mind are alike heinous in God's sight: his experience had taught the king wisdom. Now he wished to be thoroughly cleansed, and poetically says, "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." Hyssop was used in the sprinkling of the unclean under the Law. David, grasping to some extent the significance of the symbol, desired the antitypical cleansing of his *heart*. His appreciation of the Lord's thoroughness in dealing with sin and of his compassion in forgiveness are good lessons for some of the still more favored members of the "house of sons." Many of the latter, although having seen with "the eye of faith" the great Atonement for sins made by our Lord Jesus, are still unable to appreciate the fact that the application of the merit of his sacrifice is quite sufficient to cleanse us from all sin and perfect us, that we may be recognized as absolutely pure in the Father's sight and dealt with accordingly – not as sinners, but as sons.

From the statement of verse 8 we may reasonably infer that during the year that preceded this repentance King David was in so miserable a state of mind that even the music of the singers and of those who played skilfully upon the harp and all the joyous songs of Nature were sore to his heart – had no gladness in them to comfort his heart when it was barred from the Lord's presence and fellowship. This is the thought of our hymn, which says of the soul which enjoys the light of the Lord's favor: –

"Sweet prospects, sweet birds and sweet flowers
Have all gained new sweetness to me;" and

"His presence disperses all gloom, **[R3255 : page 382]**

And makes all within me rejoice;" and
"While I am so happy in him,
December's as pleasant as May."

King David was longing for the joy and gladness which he had experienced in times past, and figuratively he likens himself to one whose bones had been broken. He knew that his joy and comfort would return if he could but have back again the Lord's favor. He knew, too, that the Lord could not look upon sin with any allowance, hence his prayer: "Hide thy face from my sins and blot out mine iniquities [unrighteousness]. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not thy holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation: and uphold me with thy free Spirit."

No true Christian can read these words without feeling a deep sympathy with the different expressions; and even though as New Creatures in Christ Jesus we have had no experience with such terrible sins as those which weighed upon the heart of David, nevertheless our higher responsibilities and higher conceptions of sin under the "new commandment" and under the instructions of the holy Spirit, as sons of God, cause us to feel with proportionate weight transgressions which in the sight of the world would appear nothing – such, for instance, as we have just mentioned: covetousness, hatred, slander, which are thefts and murders from the higher standpoint of the divine view appropriate to the New Creation.

In verse 13 the prophet proposes to the Lord that his discomfiture in divine disfavor was used for the instruction of others, – to show transgressors the Lord's ways and to turn sinners from the evil of their course. How appropriate this thought to us! Not until we know experimentally through faith in the blood of Christ that our sins have been put out of the Father's **[R3255 : page 383]** sight, not until we have experienced the joys of his salvation and forgiveness, are we in any condition to be servants to the truth or illustrations to others.

Hence we see that it is only those who have been begotten of the holy Spirit who are anointed to preach the gospel. To others the Lord says, "What hast thou to do to take my word into thy mouth, seeing thou hatest instruction and castest my words behind thee?" – refusing to submit to the divine requirements.

The 14th verse repeats the same thought in a different form. If the Lord will deliver him from his *guilt* in connection with his sin, his tongue shall thereafter sing loudly the Lord's righteousness – not David's righteousness. This is the song that all the blood-washed may sing, "True and righteous are all thy ways, Lord God Almighty. Thou hast redeemed us from amongst men." None of us have any right to sing our own righteousness, for as the Apostle declares, "There is none righteous, no, not one." The mission of the cleansed ones is to accept and use the Lord's mercy towards them, to extol his righteousness, to acknowledge their unworthiness and to call upon others to recognize this fountain of righteousness and forgiveness.

"O Lord, open thou my lips: and my mouth shall show forth thy praise." This expression implies that none need expect to have a proper opening of their mouths to show forth the Lord's praises, and give the call from darkness into his marvelous light, unless the Lord shall first have opened their lips with his mercy and truth; for otherwise how could any expect to tell the glad tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people? This equally implies that all who have had forgiveness of sins should be in a condition of spirit to make a full consecration of their all to the Lord, and then all such should expect an unsealing of their lips, that the message of God's truth and grace may flow out from them for the instruction and blessing of others – as it is written, "Grace is poured upon thy lips." "Thou hast put a new song in my mouth, even the loving-kindness of our God." While these are appropriate specially to our dear Redeemer, they are appropriate also to every member of "the Church which is his *body*," and all claiming to be of "the body," who have never had their lips unsealed to confess the Lord to the extent of their

opportunity, have reason to question everything pertaining to their relationship to the Lord.

In verses 16 and 17 the King shows that he had acquired a deep insight into the meaning of some of the typical sacrifices; – though probably, by inspiration, he wrote more wisely than he understood. As we have seen in our study of Tabernacle Shadows of Better Sacrifices, only the Day of Atonement sacrifices were sin offerings, the burnt offerings and peace offerings of the remainder of the year representing the consecration to the Lord and his service. Grasping this thought prophetically, to whatever extent he also grasped it intellectually, King David expressed his realization that the Lord is pleased rather with a broken and contrite condition of heart than with burnt offerings, which were but types. So, too, we learn that nothing that we can give the Lord, even after our acceptance in Christ, has any value in his sight until first of all we have given him ourselves, – our hearts, our wills.

Let us ever keep in memory that a broken and contrite heart the Lord never despises, will never spurn. Therefore into whatever difficulty any of the Lord's people of the New Creation may stumble, if they find themselves hungering for the Lord's fellowship and forgiveness, if they find their hearts contrite and broken, let them not despair, but remember that God has made a provision through the merit of Christ which enables him to accept and justify freely from all sin all that come unto him through Jesus – through faith in his blood. There is a sin unto death – a sin unto the Second Death – from which there will be no recovery, no resurrection; but those who have broken and contrite hearts on account of their sins may know that they have not committed "the sin unto death," for their condition of heart proves this, as the Apostle declares: "It is impossible to renew again unto *repentance*" any who have committed the sin unto death – wilful sinners against full light and knowledge. Let all, therefore, rejoice in the grace of our God, who is able through Christ, his accepted way,

to save unto the uttermost all who come to him, laying aside sin and its desires.

"Now, if any man [of the Church stumble into] sin [through weakness and temptation – not intentionally] we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." (1 John 2:1.) Such, therefore, may come with faith to the throne of the heavenly grace that they may obtain mercy and find grace to help in every (future) time of need. (Heb. 4:16.) But, like David, their prayers and hopes should be for a restoration of divine favor and not for escape from chastisements needful to their correction. God forgave David, but also chastened him. – 2 Sam. 12:11-14.

Surely King David must have learned a great lesson in *mercy* from this sad experience. How many times must he have called to mind his response to Nathan's parable, "The man that hath done this thing *is worthy of death:* and he shall restore the lamb four fold, because he did this thing and because he had no pity!" Alas, poor David! these words showed that he had a mind, a heart, that was no stranger to justice and pity in other men's affairs, and hence that he was the more guilty in his much more serious violations of justice and compassion. "Blessed is he that is not condemned in that which he alloweth," – who is not condemned by his own declarations in respect to the affairs of others. Oh, how merciful to the failings of others it should make us when we remember our dear Redeemer's words, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses"; and when again we remember that we may not even pray for forgiveness of our sins unless we from the heart forgive those who have injured us and again desire our fellowship.

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