

Change

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[0 : 00] If we could just turn back to the Psalm that we read, Psalm 51. The intention was previously to navigate through the whole Psalm, but we'll just get through the first two verses.

Tell a lie, well, the first verse really, but we'll go into the second verse as well. So I'll just quickly read the first two verses. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. So I want us to look at this passage in three points, double alliteration, so I know many ministers out there will be happy to see that there's double alliteration here.

But the first one will be to look at David's cry. The second will be to look at David's confidence. And then the last part, we will look at David's cleansing in the Psalm. But before I just want to share a story that I read online, and it's about somebody, and maybe somebody can put their hand up if they know who this is, but it's a gentleman called Alfred Nobel.

Any ideas who that might be? Yes, you're thinking the Nobel Prize, no doubt. But I want to read this very quick story about Alfred Nobel, and it was just to go through a little bit about who he was.

[1 : 14] So he was a Swedish chemist, but he was also known for inventing dynamite. He believed that this invention would make war so horrible that it would never happen again because it would become so awful and so terrible that no one in their right mind would be willing to inflict that kind of terror on somebody else.

He was wrong. Instead of ending wars, dynamite made them more devastating and wide ranging than they had ever been before. He was horrified with this, but also had no idea what to do.

He also has to be said made a fortune from the sale of dynamite. And then something interesting happened. One morning around the turn of the century, Alfred woke up to read and get this.

It was his own obituary. He said, Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite who died yesterday, devised a way for more people to be killed in a war than ever before.

He died a very rich man. You see, Alfred Nobel had passed away according to this obituary, but the newspaper had made a terrible mistake.

[2 : 18] It was Alfred's older brother who had passed away. But you could probably imagine that your obituary had a profound effect on him. He realized that he didn't want to be known primarily as a person who developed the most effective killing machine of his generation and had amassed a fortune doing so.

So what did he do? Well, he founded the Nobel Peace Prize, an award for scientists and writers who foster peace. And Nobel himself said, every man ought to have the chance to correct his epitaph.

So what happened? Alfred Nobel was given a chance to make a change. He was given a chance to make a big turn to choose forces of good over evil. And ultimately, when he did pass away, he would be known not just for creating dynamite, but probably more so for creating the most well-known peace prize in the entire world.

And that's how I want us to think about this passage, to think about change. As we spoke about with the popcorn, to think about change in the context of the salmon, particularly the first two verses. Now, many of us have gone through change. Change is not something that's easy. It can often be disruptive, but it's necessary in a lot of aspects of our lives. Not many people, in fact, few people enjoy the process of change or have anything, don't want anything to do with the change that is going on.

[3 : 40] But ultimately, it's inevitable in most cases. Whether it's change in your work circumstances, whether it's change in your family situations, whether it's change in a church, the

last few years have shown us how inevitable change can be.

Even you don't have to look too far back to see the way that we shopped had changed, the way that we lived our lives, the way that we moved in our own community had changed drastically.

Not everyone likes change, and in my role within NHS Western Isles, I deal with quite a bit of organisational change. So there may be a change in the service of a particular department.

And it can be very unsettling for those on the receiving end of change. Often people are reluctant to change. They may see the benefit of it. There's a well-known picture. If you look online, there's a person shouting, who wants change?

Everyone puts their hands up. And then who wants to change? Nobody puts their hands up. We all see the need for change, but we don't often put our hands up to be the ones to go and do it. Even I was speaking to Angus at the back there, and I've peaked three times.

[4 : 43] It'll be my third time preaching with you here. And each time there's been a change in the physical place here. And it's wonderful to see. And it would have probably been difficult, not least for everyone having to paint.

But it may have been difficult. You may have had, I dare to say, your own pew, and it's possibly gone. But I think when we take that step back and when we let things settle, we realise that a lot of these changes, whether in church, whether in our workplace or our life, are for the better.

And so it is with the sinner. And our example here from David is one where we need to come with a genuine longing to change. Can we truly claim that we are confessing our sins if we're not committing to change?

One of the Puritans, Thomas Boston says, it is a sorrow for sin as sin, not only for the guilt of it, but the lonesomeness of it. Not only for the ill it does to ourselves, but the dishonour and wrong it does to a holy God.

True repentance only comes out of being authentic with ourselves, facing the reality of our sin.

Where God said, you have been forgiven, and we compare these sort of things to our desires in our own life, only then will genuine repentance and change come in our lives.

[5 : 54] And on the flip side, if we're not repenting and we're not truly committing to change, then it's something we ought to be praying about in our own lives. And it's a perilous place to be if we're not truly committing to confess our sins in our own lives.

I just look forward, or back, sorry, to Psalm 32. You don't need to go there, I'll read it just now.

Psalm 32, the first two verses of that says, blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

Blessed is the forgiven, blessed are the forgiven. The Psalm here, Psalm 51, serves as a poignant reminder to us of the need for repentance in our lives.

And as we explore these verses, let us all open our hearts to the transformative power of God's grace and mercy. And before we just delve directly into the Psalm, I want us to just very briefly look at the backdrop of this heartfelt prayer from David.

This is David, the man after God's own heart, had committed a grievous sin. In a moment of weakness, David succumbed to temptation, leading to adultery and murder.

[7 : 07] Now what we read of here is a historic account. It's not a story, it's a historic account.

There needs to be no assumptions made about what this meant or what this would have been like.

We're told at the beginning to the choir master, a Sam of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him after he'd gone into Bathsheba. We're told David wrote it and wrote it on a specific occasion, and it was when Nathan challenged him concerning his sin.

One of the commentators said, this great song pulsating with the agony stricken soul helps us to understand the stupendous wonder of the everlasting mercy of our God.

You read it in Samuel, we don't need to go there, you can maybe read it later on. Second Samuel chapter 12 that Nathan pointed out to King David that his own actions were not in keeping with his own judgment of others.

How easy it is to condemn others. We're warned, if you want to maybe just skip forward to Matthew chapter 7 very briefly, we'll just read the first five verses.

[8 : 09] If you've not got your bibles I'll just read it just now. Matthew chapter 7 verses 1 to 5, we're given a warning, it says, judge not that you be not judged, for with judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, let me take that speck out of your eye when there is a log in your own eye.

You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Yet in spite of the fact David knew what he was doing was wrong, he continued to try and conceal the sin in his own life.

He gave in to temptation, he let his eyes wander, not only that but he was hopelessly overwhelmed by the need to cover up what he had done that led him to commit murder of one of his faithful soldiers.

This was one of the lowest points in David's life. This was a man after God's own heart as the Bible tells us. He used disguise and dishonesty to cover up his adultery.

[9 : 19] God then began to deal with David. He thought he had done what he had done in private, yet God knows and sees all things in our lives. We can conceal absolutely nothing from him.

What he had done privately was far from private when it came to God. And it, when I was preparing for that, it reminded me of, there was a chap in our own congregation who, one of his previous ministers, I think it was during a children's address, had said, imagine that there was a television in the back of your head.

Would you be comfortable for people to watch it if it showed all of your thoughts, everything you were thinking, everything you'd ever done? If that was being played on a television in the back of your head, would you be comfortable for people to follow you and watch it?

And I think if we're being honest, most of us would say, no, we wouldn't want people to see the thoughts in our lives. Nothing is private when we are thinking about our wonderful God.

So how do we know that David was truly repentant here in Psalm 51? Well, the first point I said is it will consider David's cry. Like a glimmer of hope amidst darkness, David's repentance shines forth.

[10 : 26] He comes to the Lord with a broken and contrite heart, acknowledging his sins and seeking forgiveness and restoration. This demonstrates to us that no matter how grave your sin may be, there is always room for repentance in God's loving arms.

David begins this Psalm. If you look at verse one there by saying, have mercy upon me, have mercy on me, oh God. You see a cry here from his very soul as he pleads, pleads not just for mercy, not just for justice, sorry, but for mercy.

He knows what he's done is wrong, but he's pleading for mercy. David acknowledges his sins without making an excuse. We don't see him trying to justify what he did. He doesn't try to blame others.

He doesn't try to blame Bathsheba or anyone else. True repentance begins with acknowledging our wrongdoing before God. We must humbly admit our sins, bringing them into the light of God's truth. David pleads for God's mercy, understanding that God's love and compassion are greater than the depth of his sins. And likewise for us, we should be coming before the Lord, not in despair when we think of the sins in our lives, not in embarrassment, but we should come knowing in hope through his love that there is mercy beyond measure, beyond we can even comprehend, we can come to a merciful God.

[11 : 49] And David realizes this. He realizes that sin is not merely a mistake or a slip-up, it was an offense against God himself. Sin itself damages our relationship with God and our relationship with others.

When we repent though, we recognize the seriousness of our actions and their consequences and we seek restoration. This cry from David comes from a realization that he has so terribly sinned that he has nothing but deserving of God's wrath.

No, he cannot reverse or fix what he has done. There's nothing any of us can do to buy back favor with God. And why is that? Well, we may ask the question, well, why?

You might think you're a good person and what you maybe live a good life and you think you could potentially win it back. Well, sin itself is not something any one of us is able to repair.

It's not within our gift to pay God back, no matter who you are. We live in a world that glamorizes sin and trivializes its consequences. We must understand the significance of acknowledging, lamenting and ultimately seeking forgiveness for our sins.

[12 : 58] Sin separates us from God and hinders our spiritual growth. So we ought to grieve the sins in our lives, not just flippantly put them aside or just say, oh, that was a small sin.

We ought to grieve them. We ought to understand the damage that the sin does, not just in our own lives, but in the lives of others as well. Before we can even grasp the concept of grieving sin, we must understand and comprehend the nature of sin itself.

So as you mentioned, sin is a rebellion against God's perfect will, it's an act that violates His holy standards, it disrupts your relationship with Him, it damages fellowship with others and it tarnishes our own souls.

Sin manifests itself in various forms, whether it's in our actions as we spoke about that television, in our thoughts, even in our attitudes and its consequences are far reaching.

Romans 3 verse 23 reminds us that all have sinned, none of us here have not sinned, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. No one here, no one online, no one on this earth is exempt from this reality.

[14:08] Grieving our sin is a vital response to a fallen nature. As followers of Christ, we should have a godly sorrow for our transgressions. Genuine sorrow over our sin leads us to seek forgiveness and transformation, while worldly sorrow merely leads to guilt and despair.

Through grieving sin, we acknowledge our need for God's mercy and grace. Again I'm going back to one of the Puritans, Thomas Watson, who said, I'll read this a couple of times, till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet.

Till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet. The first step towards grieving sin is recognising its presence in our lives. We must honestly assess ourselves and confront the areas where we have fallen short of God's standard.

This process requires humility, humility and introspection and allows the Holy Spirit to reveal the sins in our lives. The only hope, the only hope that David had was truly to repent and it's the same for us here today in Carlyle.

We must remember however that David was a servant of God, yet he doesn't petition here by saying have mercy on me, you're servant. He doesn't use that status that he had. No, he starts off with have mercy on me, oh God.

[15:27] The one to whom I am accountable and the one who will rightly judge me for my sins. Where there is a true genuine repentance, the sinner will realise that they are at the mercy of God and God alone.

David pleads to God to cleanse him, recognising that only God can purify our hearts and make us clean. Through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross that our sins are washed away, God's grace is a powerful force that can turn even the most broken heart into something beautiful.

It's like the popcorn that we looked at, a tasteless hard kernel can be turned into something that we all enjoy and can pleasure in. David desires a renewed heart and a steadfast spirit.

Jesus involves not just asking for forgiveness but also seeking that change and that transformation, just like the popcorn that we spoke of to the young ones. David's longing for joy, sorry, it's in his grace God not only forgives us but also restores us to a place of joy and intimacy with him.

We must allow God to change us from the inside out, purifying our hearts and renewing our spirit. The weight of guilt and shame that is then lifted, we can walk in the freedom and joy that comes from knowing we are forgiven and loved by our heavenly Father.

[16:50] That second word there, have mercy on me, what is mercy? Well, when someone does something for you purely out of compassion, they seek to act for your good, not because you've earned it, not because you deserve it, not because you're a wonderful person, not purely out of kindness, but it's an act of mercy where done purely out of compassion.

And David was clearly in a state of distress here, yet he knew it would be a lot worse if he was to die in the situation he was in. He would have absolutely had eternity in view when he was penning this song.

He knew that his life on this earth was but like a grain of sand when we compare it to all sand, and even that's not a perfect comparison. He had eternity in view and knew if he was to die that very moment, he knew where he was going.

He would not have been a fit and proper candidate for heaven, so he pleads to God to act mercifully and show favour on him. I suppose it's a question to ask, is this a position that you can identify with, when you come to the Lord knowing that you have nothing in your locker to merit his mercy, and all you can do is simply ask for mercy and to be forgiven.

Have you ever felt true repentance, where you're under such distress and there's nothing that you can do to relieve you of that feeling than coming to him who knows you inside and out?

[18 : 13] If not, then I urge you to do so today. And I speak to myself first and foremost when I say that and when I was preparing for this. We ought to do it in our own lives, each and every one of us. Think of the sins in our own lives, the small things that we think are but tiny sins. We ought to repent of these and remember and bring them to the Lord. So that was David's cry and I want to just briefly to move on to David's confidence, our second point.

A true repentance is not simply a cry for mercy, but it's important to understand where that cry is directed. Just think of a child outside playing or huts themselves, they cry for help.

They don't just go to anyone for help, they don't just go to the first person they see, they go to their parents, those that they know care for them, those that they know will love them and will help them. So David's cry here is to a God that he knows is loving and merciful.

He says, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy. So he's asking the Lord, have mercy on me, but it's according to your steadfast love and according to your abundant mercy.

[19 : 21] His plea here is to a God that is steadfast in love and abundant in mercy. Before he has a hope, he knows this and he has a hope for where he is directing his cry.

I used to work in Scottish Power in the call centre, so I hope we didn't speak to anyone here. And we used to collect debt, so part of it would be people have maybe run up a bill and we would often collect debt.

And one of the things we had in our mini script was if somebody says they can't pay their bill, which was most people, the first thing you had to do was agree a plan, but get something up front, some sort of payment up front.

And you maybe have seen some of these documentaries or these programmes where it's the bailiffs and they come to the door and they say, I'll pay you at the end of the week, we want something just now. They will always ask for something up front.

When the person that is owed money offers to pay later, in order to see a commitment, the person that is owed the money will often ask for something up front. And sometimes the sinner can maybe think that as well.

[20 : 21] We maybe reduce our sin or we minimise it or we weigh it up against our church attendance or we weigh it up and say, well, I've not missed a prayer meeting for the last two or three years and you'll hold those things up against the sin in our own lives, but that's the wrong way to approach God.

He doesn't expect any contribution because you can't contribute. Our hearts and our minds are so defiled and they are filled with all things that are sinful. There is nothing you can do to offer or to show that commitment in our own lives and in what we do.

He must do the work to cleanse and wash you. All you can do is come to him crying as David did that he will deal with you mercifully. And that's what we see here in Psalm 51.

Just skip forward in the same Psalm to verse 16. David says there, for you will not delight in sacrifice or I would give it. You will not be pleased with burnt offering.

David himself is telling us clearly that he will not delight in sacrifice. He will not delight in things that we can do or things that we can offer. His hope does not lie in being able to offer sacrifice or burnt offering, but solely by the steadfast love and abundant mercy that the Lord gives him.

[21 : 36] When the sinner truly depends on their sins, they grieve and are acutely aware of the gravity of their sin. It's not something they brush off as something of no great issue or no significance.

Getting the flip side, the unrepentant sinner who tries to minimise and negate the seriousness of their sins. Maybe they say, oh, I can't be that bad. Or other people have done far worse than I have. You may be even looking at David today and think I would never do anything like David did.

Surely God understands I'm under pressure and I've got a lot of things going on in my life. If you have a small view of sin, you will not see the immensity of God. One of the gentlemen, I don't know who he is, but I read this quote in a book by Matt Smithurst.

He said, we have never committed a small sin because we have never offended a small God. We have never committed a small sin because we have never offended a small God.

Is that you? Is that me? Is that the sign of a repentant heart by blaming others or ignoring our own responsibility? Do you lose sight of the magnitude of sin?

[22 : 44] Each of us here ought to be conscious of our sinful wretched hearts, but sharing in David's confidence that our hope is in God, who is full of abundant mercy instead of fast love.

That's why David cries out in such a way to God's because he knows where it is being directed. We, however, in 2023, have one advantage that David did not have when he was penning this psalm, and that was the events of Jesus' birth, death and resurrection to reflect upon.

David was looking forward to the ultimate sacrifice that was to come. We see the answer in David's longing in this psalm at the cross. If anyone ever doubted that the God of heaven is loving and merciful, then we just need to look to the sending of his only Son who died on the cross for us. Perhaps this morning you've been overwhelmed by sin. Maybe even right now you feel overwhelmed by sin. Maybe you simply don't feel overwhelmed or are blaming others for the sins in your own life or you reduce the significance of them.

Then I urge you to look to God and ask him to have mercy on you. That takes us basically to our last point. We've seen David's cry to the Lord. We've seen his confidence in the Lord.

[23 : 57] I will now look at David's cleansing in this verse. True repentance is not about just crying to God, a God that is steadfast in love, but it's also cry for cleansing.

Look at the end of verse 1. He says, they have blot out my transgressions. David was acutely aware that for these sins to be neglected by him was to be destined for a lost eternity.

He knew these sins needed to be erased from his record on the day of judgment. Hence the words, blot out my transgressions. This is the core issue with all of mankind.

We're all born sinners, full of selfishness, full of lies and hatred. We are full of all kinds of little sins from so young. Our daughter, I wasn't planning on saying this, but our daughter, she just turned one end of May there.

Sometimes, particularly with her bigger sister, I'll say, you can see such an anger in the way she responds. She'll lash out, she'll hit, she'll scream, she'll just get so angry. When you apply that to a grown-up, they would be locked up for some of the violence and heat of the moment things that we see.

[25 : 06] So we see in even the littlest of children, they lash out, there's a hateful anger that comes from within at certain times. But when we grow up, our sins get more and more complicated.

They get darker as we try to disguise and conceal them. Jonathan Edwards, the American theologian, once said, he wrote when he was 19, a series of resolutions, and one of them, which is very difficult to do, and it's a real challenge to him, but he resolved, never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.

He resolved, never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life. Is that you? Is that me? And it's a really challenging thought, and it's something that we ought to take away today.

What do we do with the time? We've got 24 hours in the day. What do we do with it, and what do we fill that time with? So if we accept that our sins need to be dealt with, then the most important dilemma facing us today is not the recent interest hikes.

It's not the cost of living. It's not the cost of houses on our island, but it's our sinful hearts and our need for forgiveness. Oh, that today God would erase our sins from our record and welcome us into heaven.

[26 : 25] All other issues in life, everything should be reduced to the smallest of problems if we consider that truly. Will God open the record book of your life and say that the sins have been dealt with?

Well done, good and faithful servant. Will He say that for you? I often think for our own minister, and I hope it's the same here, that we're not complacent, I think many of us can be guilty when it comes to your own minister.

How blessed you are to have Thomas faithfully bringing you and Phil faithfully bringing you the truth of the gospel each and every week. Do you pray for him?

I ask, do you pray for him? I came across an article from 1972, it was written by anonymous, so I'm not able to cite who it was, but it was in 1972 edition of the banner of truth magazine.

I'm happy to send it, I think it's a really worthwhile one for congregations to read and about thinking and praying about your minister. So I'll maybe send it on and it could possibly be circulated.

[27 : 29] I've just got a couple of quotes from it that starts off with a very strong line that says, the man in the pulpit is much more likely to be ill than the man in the pew. Later on in the article it says,

few church members ever sit down to ponder just what the minister's life involves.

Many a pastor spends as long each week at his desk as a white collar worker in his church does.

Faithful prayer, general study and regular sermon preparation is a taxing business.

The pastor's life is one of much study and this is still a weirdness to the flesh. The world considers a 40 hour week, probably less now, to be about normal.

Many ministers have done much more than that before they even walk out of the study door. So I urge you to pray. Pray for Thomas and other ministers on our islands and our ministers across our denomination, pray for them because as that first line says, the man in the pulpit is much more likely to be ill than the man in the pew.

I think it's something that we often forget, I'm guilty of it myself and it's something I think we ought to remember. So pray for Thomas and Phil and the other ministers on our island. But we see, even if we were to look at other denominations, we think of other places, I'm not going to detail.

[28 : 42] But we'll see other places where maybe sin and hell, you'll not hear it from the pulpit that often or if it is there, it's very much being diluted. They will shirk away from it and it's a blessing to know that the ministry here will not lead people down a rose-tinted path to a lost eternity.

So what do we need to do in Carlyway today if you hear his voice? Well, all he asks of us is to repent of our sins. That change that we've been thinking about, even from that popcorn, that change is what we need to do.

We need to ask for forgiveness. To say as a Samaritan, have mercy on me and blot out my transgressions. Have you done that yet? Have you gone to God and said, have mercy on me? Have you gone to others and shared with them the hope that you have in Christ? This is the true nature of our repentance. David understands that God desires a genuine repentance and a contrite heart more than mere religious rituals.

True worship flows from a heart that has been humbled before God, seeking his forgiveness and surrendering to his will. As we conclude, let us remember that repentance is not a one-time event, but it's a lifelong journey.

[29 : 56] Just as King David turned to God in repentance, we too must continually examine our hearts, confess our sins and seek forgiveness from God and remember again, as Thomas Watson said, till sin be bitter in your life, till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet.

Through repentance, we open ourselves to the transformative power of God's grace, experiencing the joy of salvation and the restoration of our relationship with Him. May we, like David, be people who humbly acknowledge our sins, seek God's mercy and allow His grace to cleanse and renew us.

Let us be bearers of His forgiveness and mercy, leading others to life transforming power and repentance, like that popcorn analogy, something that is appealing, something that has an aroma to those around us.

What about those who are maybe not Christians among us or watching online? Well, I'll leave you with these simple words from one of the hymns. Nothing in my hands I bring simply to thy cross I cling.

Simply look up to Him and thank Him for being a merciful and loving God, something that is so evident in the sending of His only Son to die for your sins. Remember that popcorn kernel.

[31 : 12] We must trade the hard heart to one that is sweet and gives off a wonderful aroma of Christ Jesus. Ask Him to have mercy on you today and your record in heaven will have your sins be allotted out.

Amen. May the Lord bless His very short reflections on His word.