

Psalm 51: “Finding the ‘Good’ in Good Friday”

10 April 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call to Worship:

Well, good morning everybody and welcome to our Good Friday service, where we will be looking at Psalm 51. I know that this is a strange Good Friday, isn't it? We're locked in our homes, we're not able to travel to our holiday destinations. We are cocooned and it isn't easy, and you might be asking, "Well, what is good about it?" And people have actually asked that question for a very long time - what is "good" about Good Friday? What is good about a cross? What is good about death? What is good about a cry of desolation and forsakenness, when Jesus said, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" Why indeed? What is the purpose of all of this? And we'll look a little bit at that, and hopefully through Psalm 51 we'll come to understand a little bit more about why Good Friday is actually good. So, thank you for allowing me into your homes. Thank you for watching and for listening, and it is our prayer that God will speak to us and encourage us in these days. So, we're going to begin by singing. Our first hymn is called "Here Is Love Vast As The Ocean", and the writer has the cross in mind. So that's the answer, isn't it, that the cross is about love - God's love for us. *Here is love, vast as the ocean . . .*

Praise: IPH 402 Here Is Love Vast As The Ocean

Prayer:

So, let's take some time to pray to God.

Dear Heavenly Father, Good Friday was a day unlike any other. The Son of God, Your only Son, was nailed to a cross, stripped of His clothes, and hung to die. The sky went dark at midday, the earth shook, and some of the holy dead were raised to life. Your only Son cried words of dereliction: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Punished, alone, forsaken, and dying. Heavenly Father, we thank You that on this unusual Good Friday 2020, that it was that way. We thank You that this is the pinnacle of Your salvation story. We thank You for this amazing love and grace. We thank You that, in Your sovereignty, everything worked out exactly as planned, even to the soldiers casting lots for Jesus' clothes. And so, we pause before the cross to look upon Jesus and recognise His love for us, taking upon Himself the consequence of our sin, of willingly giving His life for ours, being forsaken by His Father so that we would not be forsaken, so that we could come and be close in relationship. We're sorry, Lord, for our sins, expressed in our attitudes and actions towards You. We admit that we cannot save ourselves, we cannot earn our salvation. We confess our rebellion, our twisted thinking, our falling short of the standard. We ask for Your grace and mercy. Forgive us and have mercy, O Lord. Yet the psalmist says they cried to You and were saved. In You they trusted and were not disappointed. The temple curtain was torn in two from top to bottom. The way of forgiveness, of access to God, was opened and the blessing of Your presence - the Holy Spirit - was given. So, in Jesus' death, we have been given eternal life. This was the most special and

important day. This was, indeed, a *good* Friday, and we respond to Your love in belief and praise. We pray, in Jesus' name, amen.

Well, we're going to look at Psalm 51, and I'm going to read it to you now, and then we'll hear it explained. If you have your Bibles close by, it would be good to open them. David is writing of how he feels, and of his experience of being helpless, and of recognising that he has done something terribly wrong that cannot be fixed. He had committed adultery with Bathsheba, he had had her husband murdered, and there were lots of terrible consequences for them that flowed from that.

Reading: Psalm 51

Sermon:

Well, if you have your Bibles, do open them, as I said, and we'll look at this together. My first heading is:

I. A Cry For Mercy (vv. 1-6)

David has had a man murdered to cover up his adultery with his wife, which is so wrong, brutal and shocking. David has totally messed up in his relationship. There's going to be no justice for Uriah - the marriage cannot be put back again, the child that has been conceived cannot be unconceived. And the penalty that David was to have, according to God's law, was his death. There is absolute carnage here, real difficulty in what he has done. And what David appeals to here is the mercy and the love of God. "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your unfailing love" (v. 1). He remembers that God has covenanted to love him. And though David has failed on his side of the covenant, God is 100% committed to the relationship with David. He doesn't back away. He doesn't give up. He doesn't discard David. That's why he says, "according to Your unfailing love, according to Your great compassion." You see, the law of God said he should die for these sins, and he realises how helpless he is, and how he deserves death and needs the mercy of God.

And perhaps for us, we are thinking, "Well, I've never committed those sins." But verse 5 asks us to think more deeply, because it says, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." That is a very profound statement, and the truth of it means that from a single cell, that we are sinful, that every part of us is sinful. And we will argue, Christians will argue, that because of that, we see that lived out in our lives, in the way that we think and the way that we act. Take David, for example. How did he end up where he was? Did he say something like, "Bathsheba shouldn't have been bathing in public. I was lonely, she was lonely. It feels so right! I'm the king - I have the right to do whatever I want! No one will know. It was real love." That's the kind of thinking that comes from a sinful heart that we cannot help, and that ultimately leads to spiritual death. That's the reality of what it means to be sinful and every part of us thinks in that particular way. Or we could go to the words of Jesus and realise that when He talked about murder, that we can murder with our words and with our attitudes, and that when we commit adultery, that we can do

that in our minds. Yes, the standard is incredibly high. We are sinners, but God is loving and merciful. One hundred percent committed. So we cry for mercy.

In the second part, we look at:

II. A Craving For Renewal (vv. 7-12)

As I've said, David recognises his sin. He has two requests of God - one is for forgiveness and the other is for renewal. The two of them are the two sides of the same coin. When we are forgiven, then there's a process of renewal. Without forgiveness, there is no renewal. And David speaks very openly about what he needs in forgiveness in those four lovely pictures (vv. 7-9). He talks about healing of a disease, he talks about washing out a terrible stain. He talks about hearing God saying - and it's a lovely picture - "It's ok," like a father to a child who knows that they've done wrong. And he also talks about the sin being deleted, as we might do on a computer, and the removing of the offence. He asks for a clean, healthy beginning to a relationship again with God, at God's initiative, to bring gladness and joy.

But David also longs for the reality of renewal. He wants to change, he wants to improve. He wants to be like God, and that is the work of the Holy Spirit, as we see in verses 10-12. He wants God to make him pure, renew him, make him steadfast and joyful. He wants God in his life. You see, David is looking now not at a half-hearted commitment, but at a whole-hearted commitment of giving everything, of being fully-in (v. 10). He desires a relationship with God (v. 11). He is wanting to be enthusiastic and keen, happy and committed (v. 12).

It's a lovely quality, isn't it, in any relationship. We look for it in every aspect of life. We praise our doctors and nurses and health care staff because of their total commitment to their job, and their giving in their job at the moment. We look for it in our sports stars and the teams that we support. We want the players to be 100% committed. We look for it in the church when we're choosing apprentices or people to serve. We're looking for people to turn up, people who give, people who tidy away, people who do things when they're not asked. That is a lovely quality within someone. That's what David wants, and that comes through the power of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life. God, will You lead me to greater commitment, will You lead me to a greater desire for You? Will You give me joy and enthusiasm in serving You in the church? That is a prayer that I need, and I would love for us all to join together in that prayer that David prayed. "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me" (vv. 10-12).

III. A Contrite Approach to God (vv.13-19)

And thirdly, we see a contrite approach to God. The alliteration, perhaps, is a bit forced, but David is keen to teach us the pathway to God - how sinners can approach God. And he wonderfully sums it up in verse 17: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, You

will not despise.” What does God despise? Well, He despises religion. He despises religion that is formal, without heart, religion without honesty, religion that keeps you at a distance, religion that is half-hearted. And He welcomes, by contrast, the person who knows they need Him, who’s afraid of death, who’s looking for an answer, who’s confused and wishes to make sense of the brokenness of the world and their own heart; who’s aware of sin and the failure it brings in relationships and in other aspects of life, who’s made a mess of things, and has nowhere and no one to turn. And He promises to such people He will not humiliate, reject, or turn them away.

And ultimately, this is the way that God has approached us. This is how Jesus came to earth. He became a man and lived in our world, with the limitations of our body. He was gentle and humble. He submitted to death, even death on a cross. He accepted the blame for our sins and was willing to be punished instead of us. And He did it all with the approach of absolute submission and trust towards His heavenly Father. “Into Your hands I commit my spirit,” He cried as He died (Luke 23:46). God did not despise His sacrifice, He vindicated His humility and love, He rose Him from the dead on the third day.

And the challenge for us in the midst of COVID-19 is this: it has removed from us much of our formal religion. It has taken away many of our freedoms. It has challenged our way of life. It has challenged, particularly, that we are in control of our lives, and we see now that we are definitely not. This virus and this situation has reminded us of our need, and we have appreciated the skills of those with servant hearts. We are finding that being dependent on others is not so bad, and God is calling us to see that He is committed to us in covenant love. *Recognise the need you have as sinful people, and I will forgive you. Recognise the need you have for a new heart, and I will renew you. I will give the Holy Spirit.* That is the reality of what God achieved through His Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross. and that indeed means that it was a Good Friday, because God Himself is good. Amen.

Cleansed and committed hearts - that is our desire as we humbly come before the Lord and we ask Him by His Holy Spirit to transform and renew us, to purify our hearts and to soften them to His will. So, as our time together on this *good* Friday comes to a close, we offer up that prayer in the hymn “Breathe on Me, Breath of God”.

Closing Praise: IPH 457 Breathe On Me, Breath Of God

Benediction:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.