

“Create In Me a Clean Heart”

It was spring, the time when Kings go off to war, but one king stayed home instead and sent his commanders to the battlefield by themselves to do his dirty work for him. Why did this king stay home? There was a woman of striking beauty who had caught his eye and the king liked to go up on the roof to get a glimpse of her bathing.

With too much time on his hands the king began to think about her constantly, until finally he asked someone to inquire about her. He found out her name and all about her family. He knew he should not do it, for she was already married, but he was captivated by her beauty and so he sent for her. She obliged, after all it was the king. How could she say no to him?

Maybe she did not want to say no. Maybe she liked him staring at her as she bathed. Maybe she was intentional about him seeing her after she had purified herself from her uncleanness. But maybe not. Maybe she came because she was intimidated and afraid of saying no to the most powerful man in her country. We don't know, the story does not tell us.

None-the-less, she comes to the king and they sleep together. She becomes pregnant. Now there is a problem. People know this woman is married and when she starts to show the husband will know it is not his child because he has been on the battlefield. So the king begins to concoct a plan to cover up his tryst with the woman.

He sends for her husband and tells him to go home and take a break from all the fighting. He offers him a gift as an incentive to go. But the man would not go. Instead of going home he slept by the palace of the king. He was a dedicated soldier. The king asked him why he did not go home. The man replied how could I do such a thing when my comrades are defending our nation from our enemies?

The king was persistent so he tried again. He got the man drunk, hoping that he would go home with his defenses down and sleep with his wife. But the man was stubborn even in his drunkenness. He would not go home. He was on duty for his country.

The king saw he was getting nowhere with this man so he devised a plan that would have him killed on the battlefield. That way the king could immediately take his widowed wife and make her his. And that way nobody would ever know that her child was conceived out of wedlock. But he had to act quickly so he wrote a note to his commander and said place that man on the frontlines of the battlefield and then have his comrades abandon him so he will be killed by our enemies.

The king was willing to murder this man in order to cover up his sin. Not only that, but he even had the audacity to send the letter to his commander by the hands of the man whom he intended to have killed on the battlefield.

Clueless to the death warrant now he was carrying the man took the letter to the king's commanding officer. The officer opened the letter and read it and then carried out the king's

request. Again, how could anybody say no to the king? The commander intentionally put the soldier in harm's way so he would be killed in battle.

The man was murdered and his widowed wife, overwhelmed by guilt, mourned her husband's death. The king then took the widow to be his wife and now he was free, or so he thought. Nobody will ever know what happened between me and her because now she is my wife and everyone will think our child was conceived after our marriage instead of an adulterous affair. But that is not what happened. The Bible warns us that our sins will find us out. (Numbers 32:23)

A prophet comes to the king and tells him a story about a rich man who had lots of sheep and a poor man who only had one little lamb. One day someone came to visit the rich man and instead of taking one of his own sheep to prepare the meal he stole the one lamb the poor man had and killed it for his evening meal. The King was enraged. This man must pay for times over for what he has done, he shouted.

The prophet then said to the king you are that man. God has richly blessed you and yet you were not satisfied. Instead, you committed adultery with one of your soldier's wives and then you had him put to death on the battle field to cover your sin. **“Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes?” (II Samuel 12:9)**

This king, of course, is King David, the second king of Israel. The woman is Bathsheba and the dead soldier is Uriah the Hittite. David is the man who slew Goliath with a rock and a sling shot and to whom God promised there would be someone from his line on the throne forever.

He is also the writer of many of the Psalms we are studying, including the one we are looking at today, and the one who the Bible says was **“a man after God's own heart.” (Acts 13:22)**

The New Testament tells us that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God and Lord and Savior of everyone who ever has been or will be saved, *is* the one through whom God fulfills His promise to David to have someone from his line sit on the throne forever.

How could the Scriptures say David was a man was after God's own heart after having done what he did? And how could God forgive him after such wicked, cold and calculating act?

These are the thoughts of many people once they give serious consideration to the story I just told you. But we need to remember what the Scriptures say about each one of us, lest we become self-righteous in our attitudes toward David or God.

The Scriptures say that **“the heart is desperately wicked and it is deceitful above all things” (Jeremiah 17:9)** and that there is **“No one righteous, not even one, and that our mouths are full of cursing and our feet are quick to shed blood.” (Paul's summation of OT teaching in Romans 3 derived from the Psalms)** Jesus said of the human condition that **“out of the heart come all kinds of evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, and slander.” (Matt. 15:19)**

I have taught on this particular Psalm in several Bible studies through the years and I have learned that one of the most unpopular verses in all the Bible is verse 5, where David in his prayer says, **‘Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.’**

Many people do not like this verse and I have argued with them about it until I was blue in the face. They do not like to think of infants in such a way but what David says is true and I say it is true not only because the Bible says it is so but because it can be empirically proven.

Yes, when a child has been born he is not guilty of having committed any sin but he is born with a sinful nature. Though the seed may not have sprouted yet, the seed is still there and that sinful nature will rear its ugly head in the life of the child sooner rather than later.

If we are *not* born with a sinful nature then it begs the question of why someone else besides Jesus Christ has never lived a sinless life.

The reason it has never happened is because it is not within the realm of possibilities for humans to do it because we are born with sinful natures. This is the consequence of living in a fallen and broken world. Something changed about our human condition when Adam and Eve fell in the garden.

What I am trying to say to you as we look at this prayer is that we are all on a level playing field when it comes to our human condition. We are all sinners.

I am also trying to say to you is that every one of us is capable of falling in the way that David did. We should not be self-righteous.

One of my favorite verses in Scripture is what Paul said to the church in Corinth. **“So if you are think you are standing firm, be careful lest you fall!” (I Cor. 10:12)** Don’t ever say to yourself I would never do this or that. That’s what Peter said about never denying Jesus. It is a foolish and naïve statement because it fails to account for your human condition. Be wise. Know what you are capable of as a sinner.

Most importantly, what I am trying to say to you is that there is no sin that God cannot forgive except for one, and it is *not* murder or sexual immorality.

The only sin that God cannot forgive is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The role of the Holy Spirit is to convict the sinner of his sin and drive him to the cross of Christ to find mercy and be reconciled unto the Father. The person who resists the work of the Holy Spirit in his life to lead him to Christ will *not* be forgiven. That is the one unforgivable sin. But beyond that every sin can and will be forgiven if you will but seek the right medicine that leads to forgiveness.

I love what the crusty old Westminster Confession of Faith says about God’s capacity to forgive our sins in Jesus Christ. The confession says, **“As there is no sin so small that it does not deserve damnation; yet there is no sin so great that it could ever bring damnation upon those who truly repent.”**

That is to say that even tiniest of sins is sufficient enough to condemn us to hell if we do not repent, yet even the greatest of our sins could ever keep us out of the Kingdom of God if we will but repent.

What does it mean to repent? It means to forsake sin and turn to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

For some people here today that might mean that you need to repent of your self-righteousness because you think your sins are tiny and do not warrant the shedding of blood for the forgiveness of sins. You know Jesus died for sins, you've heard it a million times, but you think that was only for bad people, not people like yourself who live good lives.

But for others repentance might mean coming to the realization that whatever thing it is in your life, either past or present, that is eating away at you, that you think is unforgiveable, is in fact forgivable. Quit wallowing in your guilt. Accept and believe the good news of the gospel.

Jesus Christ died for sinners. He died for your sins so that you could be forgiven.

Those who are here today who may be thinking, "God could never forgive me for what I have done," I would say to you the guilt you are feeling for your sin is real and that the fact that you are wrestling inside with a fear that God could never forgive you for what you have done is simply a reflection that you intuitively recognize that God in his justice will punish your sin. But you are only getting half the story.

The good news of the gospel is that the Father sent His Son into the world in order to bear the wrath and curse of God upon your sin, so that your sins could be dealt with justly and you be forgiven.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ has died for our sins, even the sins of murder and adultery, so why won't you believe the good news of the gospel? **"Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24)**

If you will ask the Lord to "blot out your transgressions," "create in you a clean heart," "wash you whiter than snow," and "restore the joy of your salvation" and "heal your crushed bones," the Lord will do it.

It is the one prayer that God always answers. God loves sinners. God loves you and me and that is why He always answers the prayers of a broken and contrite heart.

"The sacrifices of God are a broken and contrite spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." (v.17)

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.