

Today marks a year since the start of the hard lockdown in South Africa on the 26th of March 2020 at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic

Sermon: Against you, you only, have I sinned

Readings: Psalm 51:1-13 and Romans 7:7-20

The Bible is full of examples of people with power exploiting their fellow men, women and children. Power from position, wealth, physical strength. News reports in our fallen world reflect this exploitation daily.

Today is the 21 March. It is a public holiday - Human Rights day. In South Africa this day is historically linked with 21 March 1960, and the events of Sharpeville. On that day 69 people died and 180 were wounded when police fired on a peaceful crowd that had gathered in protest against the Pass laws. This day marked an uprising by ordinary people, rising in unison to proclaim their rights. It became a remembered date in our country's history that we commemorate as Human Rights Day as a reminder of our rights and the cost paid for our treasured human rights.¹

What are human rights? Human rights are rights that everyone should have simply because they are human. In 1948, the United Nations defined 30 articles of human rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It established universal human rights on the basis of humanity, freedom, justice, and peace. The Bill of Rights in our Constitution is the cornerstone of our constitutional and representative democracy. The rights protected in our Bill of Rights include the right to Equality, Protection from Unfair Discrimination, Human Dignity, Life, Privacy, and Freedom of religion.

What people sometimes lose sight of is that every right comes with an obligation.

The need for the legal protection of these rights has come about because of the abuse and exploitation of men, women and children especially those who are marginalised.

Jesus knew his. He challenged the social and religious treatment of those considered to be marginalised.

No Bill of rights would be needed if all would heed the instruction from Jesus recorded by Matthew:

¹ See article: [Human Rights Day - Parliament of South Africa](#)

“¹²So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”²

“Do to others what you would have them do to you.”

This morning we are going to look at one man's abuse of others, how his behaviour was exposed and how he came before God confessing his sin and praying for forgiveness.

I am talking about David. We know more about David than any other Old Testament person largely because David poured out his heart in some 70 Psalms written by him

Although David is described as “a man after God's own heart” twice in the Bible³ he was not perfect and needed to come to God for forgiveness. And this encourages us because all of us stumble and fall.⁴ But by grace we can come to God through Jesus for forgiveness.

“Grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us more... And grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us less... Grace means that God already loves us as much as an infinite God can possibly love.”⁵

But David's story beckons. David, the young shepherd identified to be King had done many great things with God at the centre of all he undertook. Anointed by Samuel to be King⁶ he had slain Goliath and became a great warrior and leader revered by his people. But we pick up his story later in his life.

In 2 Samuel 11 we read that it was spring, the time when kings went off to war. But this year David remained in Jerusalem and sent Joab and the whole Israelite army to destroy the Ammonites. One evening David got up and walked on the roof. He looked down and saw a beautiful woman bathing. And then a lot of sending takes place.

- David sends a messenger to find out about her and learns she is Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of David's soldiers.

² Matthew 7:12

³ 1 Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22: “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will”.

⁴ Romans 3:23 23 “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. And Isaiah 53:6:”⁶ All of us, like sheep, have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the wrongdoing of us all To fall on Him.”

⁵ Philip Yancey, What's So Amazing About Grace?

⁶ 1 Samuel 16:13 – “¹³ Samuel took the flask of olive oil and anointed David in the presence of his brothers. The Lord's Spirit came over David and stayed with him from that day on.”

- David sends for her and he slept with her.
- Bathsheba sends a message to David to tell him that she is pregnant.
- David sends a message to Joab to send Uriah to him.
- David tries to send Uriah to Bathsheba but Uriah slept at the entrance to the Palace and said "How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife "while the ark and Israel and Judah" are at war staying in tents in the fields.
- David's attempt to have Uriah sleep with Bathsheba fails and he sends Uriah back to battle with a note to Joab "Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die."
- Joab sends a messenger to tell David that Uriah was dead.
- David sends for Bathsheba and she became his wife.

David seems untouched for some time about what he has done. I am the king and a man and if I desire this woman can't I have her after all I have done for the nation? And Uriah? Well the risks of battle are such that soldiers get killed.

But the story doesn't end there. We read in the next chapter that the Lord sent Nathan the prophet to rebuke David.⁷

And he does so by telling one of the most striking parables in the Old Testament.

There were two men, one rich and one poor. The rich man had many sheep and cattle but the poor man had only one little ewe lamb. It was a pet raised with his children and was like a daughter to him.

A traveller came to the rich man who did not take one of his sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the visitor. He took the ewe of the poor man for the meal.

And then we read that David burned with anger against the man and he said:

"As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for the lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

And then Nathan looks at David and says: "You are the man!"

And then he goes on to relate how much the Lord had given David and that he could have had more. "*Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his*

⁷ 2 Samuel :12

eyes? *You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.*"

And then David sees what he has done and he says:

"I have sinned against the Lord."

David is not saying that he has not sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah, but the realisation hits him that in doing so he has sinned against God.

And this is reflected in Psalm 51 as he opens his heart to God. A psalm written after Nathan has confronted him. I want to look at the first 13 verses. In David's Psalm 32 David gave thanks for having been forgiven. In this Psalm 51 David prays fervently for forgiveness.

David comes with honesty, directness and brokenness before God praying for mercy for what he now understands he has done. He appeals to God's unfailing love and compassion.

*"1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion."*

David attempts no self-justification. He has experienced God's loving kindness before and he pleads for this again. And he prays for the slate to be wiped clean;

*"blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin."*

Make me clean in your sight!

And David goes on:

"3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight;"

David knows and admits his sin, knows that he has done evil in God's sight and that
"Against you, you only, have I sinned."

David doesn't plead not guilty, or guilty but ... He accepts that God's judgment of him would be correct and justified.

*"so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge."*

David says that his sin is always before him and that he was sinful at birth from the time he was conceived. He accepts that his conduct was not a rare deviation. It sprang from what he was, and had been from birth. He is talking about man's fallen nature. In Psalm 58 he wrote⁸:

"Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies."

He knows that relying on his own strength he has sinned and that he will stumble and fall again.⁹

He knows that God requires truth in the inmost place, in his heart and that wisdom from God is to replace his own will and his own desires. He wrote in Psalm 37 that the righteous speak what is just, and that their feet do not slip because the law of their God is in their hearts.¹⁰

He also knows that his hope lies in God and having God at the centre of all he does rather than having himself on centre stage.

And then he prays to be cleansed with Hyssop so that he will be whiter than snow.

Hyssop was used in ritual cleansing and David prays that he be "un-sinned" - that his iniquity be blotted out. Where his sin has been recorded he prays that this will be forever and completely erased

He prays that his bones will rejoice. Bones that have been crushed, not physically, but as a result of his conduct and his understanding his sin. That through the assurance of the forgiveness of his sins that he will know joy.

⁸ Psalm 58:3

⁹ Read: Romans 7:7-20

¹⁰ See Psalm 37:30-31. "30 The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak what is just. 31 the law of their God is in their hearts; their feet do not slip."

David then prays a prayer for the restoration of his heart and spirit in verses 10 and 11.

He starts with this line:

"¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,"

God is our creator God and here David prays for something new, a heart that is pure. That his inherent sinful nature be transformed by God. And more than this that God renew a steadfast spirit within him.

David's prayer recalls the rejection of Saul.

In 1 Samuel we read that after Samuel had anointed David to be king that "the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul" and he had been tormented by an evil spirit. David had been forced to flee and had been hunted by Saul and his army after this. He prays now that God will not cast him from His presence or take His Holy Spirit from him.¹¹

David concludes these 13 verses with a prayer for the restoration to the joy of salvation.

"¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation". After months of unconfessed sin and absence from God's wisdom in his heart, David longs for the joy of having God in his heart. The joy of salvation.¹²

He longs for the embrace received by the prodigal son from his father on his return.

And he prays that this will not be a momentary turning back to God but that he will be sustained by a willing spirit. Jesus would later teach His disciples to pray not only that their sins would be forgiven but that they would not be led into temptation and that they would be delivered from evil.

David then states;

¹¹ It has been noted that several of these requests don't fit for the believer under the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 36:25-27). In the New Covenant the believer already has a new heart and is promised the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. This point is technically true, yet doesn't take away from the deep sense of a need for restoration and return to the first things that may mark an erring child of God even under the New Covenant. From: [Enduring Word Bible Commentary Psalm 51](#)

¹² See [Enduring Word Bible Commentary Psalm 51](#)

*"¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you."*

I believe that David's repentance leads him to this response, that he will teach others from his sin-filled experience. That he would teach 'transgressors' that they could, and should, come before God confessing and asking for forgiveness. Asking that God would show them his ways and that he would guide them in truth, so that their hope would be in Him all day long.¹³

By doing this David knew that sinners would be restored in their relationship with God.

Psalms 51 gives us a deep and practical guide to coming before God to confess our sins and to pray for forgiveness. Consider Psalm 51 when you sense that God is not at the centre of all you are doing. Not sure what to pray? Adapt the words of this Psalm to your situation and pray through the verses. We will do so at the end of this message.

Three main thoughts that I want you to remember and apply:

1. When you do wrong to others or fail to do what you know you ought to do you sin not only against those affected, but against God. "Against you, you only, have I sinned."
2. If you are hesitating or unsure as to what to do or not do in a situation apply the test of doing unto others what you would have them do to you.
3. Own God's grace. "Grace means there is nothing you can do to make God love you more... And grace means there is nothing you can do to make God love you less... Grace means that God already loves you as much as an infinite God can possibly love."

Amen.

Gordon Hay Trinity 21 March 2021

Two songs to listen to by clicking on these links:

Psalms 51 Graham Kendrick at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IRQTaSo9Nc>

Rock of Ages Cleft for me: at: [Rock of Ages Cleft for Me | Fountainview Academy | God so Loved the World - YouTube](#)

¹³ Psalm 25: 4-5. "Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths. 5 Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long."