

PSALLO

Psalm 51

In the translation and metrical setting of Psalm 51 you have before you, we have endeavored to render the Hebrew clearly, with an eye to preserving the metrical nature of the Psalm. We have added a small repeat in some of the phrasing to facilitate an English meter, and much of the translation will be familiar, seeing that many of our English translations are quite true to the Hebrew. We have translated the Hebrew word חֶסֶד *chesed*, often translated as “mercy” or “lovingkindness” as “Covenant-Faithfulness” seeing that it describes that everlasting fidelity the Lord has toward all those with whom He has entered into covenant through His Son. The word translated as mercy is the Hebrew word רַחֲמִים *rachamim*, which is a plural, by which is understood the plenteousness of God’s forgiving mercy.

This is a penitential Psalm, which is reflected in the name of the tune. As we learn in the “Psalm Title” or introduction, (verse 1 in the Hebrew Psalter) this is a Psalm of David, and the occasion, his confession and repentance before the Lord upon his sin with Bathsheba, the murder of Uriah, and those other sins and circumstances surrounding this occasion. As has been noted by many commentators, the Psalms encompass much, if not all, godly emotion and devotion in their inspired lyrics.¹ Such recognition has prompted the Church, and I believe rightly, to class certain Psalms according to this usage. For instance, we have called Psalm 51 a Penitential Psalm. The same might also be said of Psalms 38, 102, 130, 143. In these Psalms we learn from the inspired authors squarely, fully, to face and embrace our sins, rather than to ignore them, and as well we learn what true repentance “looks like” as we behold inspired penitence. There are Psalms which teach us how to pour out our soul before our merciful and faithful Lord in times of great affliction. Such Psalms included here would be Psalms 3, 4, 55, 102, and many others, where we learn to distinguish casting our care upon Christ from murmuring and unholy complaint. There are, as we have discussed in a previous installment, imprecatory Psalms, in which we learn to ask the Lord to defend us, and save us from His and our enemies by thoroughly defeating them in their counsels, and by preserving us until such deliverance is accomplished. Such would include Psalms 35, 58, 59, 83, 109, etc. There are Psalms of thanksgiving and adoration, where we learn to express our gratitude to the Lord

for His great benefits, forgetting none of them. Such would include Psalms 8, 19, 19, 65, 67, and of course, the crescendo of praise and adoration in Psalms 146, 147, 148, 149, and 150. There are what have been styled the Royal Psalms, in which our Lord Jesus Christ, in the Spirit of Prophecy, is seen as the King of Kings, enthroned, as Sovereign Lord and Judge over all creation, and in which we learn to praise Him as such. We might include Psalms 2, 18, 20, 45, 72, 101, 110 among others in this division. Related to the former category, there are those Psalms that have been called Enthronement Psalms, in which the Lord is seen in the greatness of majestic rule, in which He is seen as it were in His coronation ceremony, ascending His throne, ruling the nations, defeating the counsel of his enemies, and exalting His people. We would include here Psalms 47, 93, 96-99. In these latter categories of Psalms we learn how to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ as King of Nations, the sovereign ruler in the affairs of men.

There are more. We could speak of the Psalms of lamentation, where we learn how to express to the Lord our disappointments and grief. There are the Zion-Psalms, where we learn of the special care and love the Lord has for His Church of all ages, and how we are to be mindful of and thankful for such great care. There are songs of corporate praise, private praise, corporate affliction, private affliction, in which we learn to worship the Lord in all kinds of circumstances—in the corporate worship of the saints, and in the private and secret places of our individual communion with the Lord. Truly the Psalms furnish for the Church of all ages those inspired words in which she might express her joys, and her disappointments. In the singing of these inspired songs she will show forth her favored position as the Church of the Living God, in that she has learned these great Gospel-truths, and understood to the best of the ability her human frame allows the greatness, majesty, sovereignty, holiness, righteousness, and eternity of her Great Lord, who has graciously revealed Himself to her, and brought her into the circle of His confidence (Psalm 25.14; 91.1). Truly, the Psalms breathe of a rarified and inspired air that no human composition can approach, and yet in these very Psalms we have the entire compass of our humanity there inscribed. Let us therefore take up these Psalms and sing with grace in our hearts. In triumph and defeat, when we abound and when we are abased, whether full of praise or penitent, beholding the majesty, sovereignty, holiness of our Great Father, His Son, and His Spirit, let us offer the sacrifice of our lips, making mention of His Name.

TODD L. RUDDELL ■

THE AUTHOR: The Rev. Todd L. Ruddell is pastor of Christ Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church (RPCGA) in Wylie, Texas.

1. See ‘The True Psalmody’, Ministers of the Reformed and United Presbyterian Churches of Philadelphia (1859) as published by Naphthali Press, *An Anthology of Presbyterian & Reformed Literature* volume 4 (Dallas, Tex.: Naphtali Press, 1991) 255–257.

Psalm 51:1-19

To the chief Muscian, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba

Penitential

Todd L. Ruddell

1 Have mer - cy on me have mer - cy O God, ac - cord - ing to,
 4 For a - gainst Thee, Thee on - ly have I sinned 'gainst Thee I've sinned,
 7 O purge Thou me, with hys - sop I shall be clean, O wash me Lord,
 12 O Lord the glad - ness of Thy sal - va - tion re - store to me,
 16 For Thou dost not de - sire sac - ri - fice, else would I give,

- thine e - ter - nal cov' - nant faith - ful - ness
 and done this e - vil, in Thy sight
 I shall be whit - er whit - er than the snow.
 sus - tain me with a spir - it wil - ling and free
 nei - ther de - light - est in burnt of - fer - ing

And in ac - cord - ance with thy mer - cy great, thy mer - cy great
 That right - eous Thou might - est be when Thou speakst, when Thou dost speak
 8 O Lord make me to hear glad - ness and joy, let me re - joice
 13 Then shall I teach trans - gres - sors all thy ways, yea all thy ways,
 17 God's sac - ri - fic - es are a bro - ken spir - it, and bro - ken heart,

- whol - ly blot out mine in - iq - ui - ties.
 and in - no - cent in what thou dost judge.
 let the bones which thou, didst break re - joice.
 and so shall sin - ners be, turn - ed un - to thee
 O God - and con - trite, Thou dost not de - spise

2 O through - ly purge thou me from mine in - iq - ui - ty
 5 For be - hold I was brought forth in in - iq - ui - ty
 9 Hide Thou Thy face from my sins blot out mine in - iq - ui - ties.
 14 De - liv - er me, God of my sal - va - tion from blood - guil - ti - ness
 18 May thy good pleas - ure to Zi - on bring forth pros - per - i - ty

And from all my trans gres - sion Lord cleanse Thou me!
 And in guilt - i - ness did my moth - er con - ceive me.
 10 O God cre - ate a clean heart, re - new a right spir - it in me.
 And so my tongue shall show forth all thy right - eous - ness.
 Build Thou up Je - ru - s'lem's walls cause her safe to be.

3 For I do take knowl - edge of my trans - gres - sions and Lord my sin,
 6 Lo Thou de - sir - edst truth in hid - den parts, and in my depths,
 11 O Cast thou me not a - way from Thy face, and do not take,
 15 O Lord my lips o - pen Thou and my mouth, O Lord my mouth,
 19 Then right - eous sac - ri - fic - es shalt Thou ac - cept, and of - frings whole,

- Thy is - dom ev - er be - fore me.
 Thy wis - dom wilt Thou mak - est known to me.
 thine Ho - ly Spir - it a - way from me.
 shall de - - clare a - broad thy glo - ri - ous praise.
 of bul - locks shall they, on thine al - tar lay.