

Devotion for March 26, 2025 – Lenten Midweek Service

Psalm 51:8-9 EHV

**Theme: From Sadness to Celebration: God erases our guilt.**

*<sup>8</sup>Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones you have crushed celebrate. <sup>9</sup>Hide your face from my sins. Erase all my guilty deeds.*

Have you ever felt overwhelming guilt over a past sin that you repented of long ago? Even though you know the LORD forgives you, you still feel broken. Why? Perhaps the earthly consequences of your sin persist, such as strained relationships with family members, financial difficulties, or people still looking down on you because of your sin. You yearn to feel joy — living in the peace of Christ’s forgiveness - but you feel like you can never have it. The devil even tempts you to wonder whether God is punishing you for your past transgression.

Even though the LORD forgives our sins, He may allow us to experience their earthly repercussions. Why, as punishment? No, but as discipline: to teach and train our faith as we cling to God’s promises in Scripture that proclaim our forgiveness in Christ. He wants us to be so deeply repulsed by sins that we don’t easily return to them. More importantly, He wants us to remain focused on Jesus, trusting Him to fulfill His gracious promise to forgive us and work in everything for our everlasting good.

Guided by the example of King David, let us reflect on these matters under the theme: **From Sadness to Celebration: God Erases Our Guilt.**

Even though the prophet Nathan immediately forgave King David after his repentance regarding Uriah and Bathsheba, David still felt crushed. Why? Because the earthly consequences of his sin remained. As the Lord decreed through Nathan, David’s child with Bathsheba fell ill and was on the brink of death.

Could you imagine what that would have been like for David: seeing your baby’s life slowly ebbing away as it coughs, sneezes, and cries, all the while knowing that you were to blame? Worse yet, there was nothing you could do to change the outcome. You fast, you cry, and make your body miserable, hoping that by punishing yourself, God will mercifully spare your son. You do everything you can, but nothing helps. All your prayers and pleadings are met with deafening silence.

Oh, how you wish you could change the past, but you can’t. How you wish you could change God’s mind, but you can’t. Your child is dying because of your sin. Each passing day blends into the next until suddenly, the news comes: Your child is dead.

David undoubtedly felt the crushing weight of his sin during that agonizing time as he watched his child succumb to death. Despite his repentance and assurance of forgiveness, he still had to endure this harsh discipline. What sustained King David during this difficult period? The Lord’s mercy. That’s why he fasted and prayed—hoping to change God’s mind so his child would live.

But God didn't change his mind, and the child died. How did David respond? Did he lash out at God in anger, accusing God of being unmerciful and cruel? Did he despair of God's grace and withdraw from His presence? No, instead he cleaned himself up, went to the house of the LORD, and worshipped God. Why? Because, even though the LORD didn't answer David's prayer as he had hoped, he still trusted a truth that the apostle Paul would later express in his letter to the Romans: "*We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God.*"<sup>i</sup>

As David went to worship the LORD in the temple after his son's death, I can envision him praying our sermon text:

*<sup>8</sup>Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones you have crushed celebrate. <sup>9</sup>Hide your face from my sins. Erase all my guilty deeds.*

How could David expect the LORD to grant him joy and gladness after such a heart-wrenching tragedy? Because he trusted in the LORD's promised mercy. He believed that the days of agonizing over his son were not punishment but discipline. Yes, his son would not return to him, but someday, in the future, David would meet his son in heaven. What gave him such hope? The LORD's promise of a Saviour.

Nevertheless, David also felt crushed. He yearned to experience the joy and gladness he felt before his sin, something that could only happen if God forgave his sin and erased his guilt. But that raises the question: hadn't the prophet Nathan already told David: "*The LORD himself has put away your sin*"? Wasn't David already forgiven? Yes, he was.

Why, then, did David feel the need to ask God again to hide His face from his sin and erase all his guilt? Because, even though he trusted that God forgave him, the earthly consequences of his sin tempted him to feel unforgiven. David's faith and emotions conflicted with each other, which is why he cried to the LORD for the reassurance and peace that only the LORD could provide: that God had put away David's sin from His sight and taken his guilt away forever.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, haven't you felt like David at various times in your life: trusting that God forgave your sins but still feeling as if you're being punished for your past? I have, and so have many of the people I have counselled throughout my ministry. For some, the earthly consequence of their sins triggered their inner turmoil – like going to jail for a crime or facing public mockery over a private sin that was made public. For others, some event that had nothing to do with their past sin triggered a memory of it.

Even though these Christians knew they were forgiven, feelings of guilt and shame resurfaced. The devil tempted them with thoughts like: "If God forgave your sin, why are you still suffering? Sure, maybe God can forgive you because he forgives everyone, but you still must live with your sin. You still must suffer for it. God is punishing you and there is nothing you can do about it except live in despair."

While the devil's temptations may not be as straightforward as I've portrayed, that's essentially how he manipulates us to feel, especially when our suffering is directly linked to our sin, as was

the case with David when his child fell ill. How do we confront such thoughts and maintain our faith in Jesus' forgiveness? We pray the prayer in Jesus' name that David prayed in our devotion text: *<sup>8</sup>Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones you have crushed celebrate. <sup>9</sup>Hide your face from my sins. Erase all my guilty deeds.*

And how does the LORD respond to our prayers? He reassures us that He has already turned his face away from our sins and erased our guilt. How so? By placing all our sins on Jesus. When the Father gazed upon Jesus hanging on the cross, He saw us and punished Jesus as if He were punishing us. And when Jesus declared, "It is finished," He proclaimed that all our sins had been fully paid for. Jesus' resurrection proves His declaration is true, that *as distant as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our rebellious acts from us.*<sup>ii</sup>

At our baptisms, God personally washed away our guilt, clothed us in Christ's righteousness, adopted us as His sons, and sealed us with the Holy Spirit. Even though we may not "feel" righteous or forgiven, that does not negate the fact that we are righteous and forgiven in Christ.

If that is the case, why, then, does the LORD allow hard times in our lives that tempt us to feel like we aren't forgiven? He does it to discipline us – not in the sense of punishing, but training. The author of the letter to the Hebrews explains it this way:

*<sup>5</sup> My son, do not regard the Lord's discipline lightly, and do not become weary of his correction. <sup>6</sup> For the Lord disciplines the one whom he loves, and he corrects every son he accepts. <sup>7</sup> Endure suffering as discipline. God is dealing with you as sons. Is there a son whose father does not discipline him? <sup>8</sup> If you are not disciplined (and all of us have received it), then you are illegitimate children and not sons. <sup>9</sup> In addition, we have earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them. Should we not submit even more to the Father of the spirits and live? <sup>10</sup> They disciplined us for a little while, according to what seemed best to them, but God disciplines us for our good, so that we may have a share in his holiness. <sup>11</sup> No discipline seems pleasant when it is happening, but painful, yet later it yields a peaceful harvest of righteousness for those who have been trained by it.*<sup>iii</sup>

What training did David receive as he watched his son slowly pass away? He was forced to rely on God's promised grace. Even though everything he experienced was telling him to give up his hope in God's mercy, He clung to God's promises – so much so that He could even praise God when his son died. How could he do that? Because his faith was not built upon his feelings or experiences, but upon the very Word of God. That is what sustained him, and that is what sustains us too.

Therefore, dear Christian, whenever you feel the weight of your sinfulness crushing you, so much so that you are tempted to wonder whether God is punishing you for some past sin, turn to God in prayer as David did: asking the LORD to erase your guilt and turn his face from your sin. Then rise from your prayer looking to Jesus: trusting that, because of Him, God has indeed turned away from your sin and erased your guilt. Live in the peace of that forgiveness, regardless of how emotionally distraught you feel. Like David, go and worship the LORD, for he will turn your sadness into celebration as He erases your guilt and keeps all the promises He made to you in Christ. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Romans 8:28 EHV

<sup>ii</sup> Psalm 103:12 EHV

<sup>iii</sup> Hebrews 12:5b-11 EHV