

Psalms 51:7 - Relying on God's Grace

While I was in college I worked a part time job at the local butter factory. While working at the butter factory, you had a couple of pairs of jeans and a few shirts that were your uniform. When I first started, you were required to bring your own jeans. Working at the butter factory meant that we dealing with and handling butter almost the entire time. We would open up large blocks of butter, 55 pound boxes, and we would send the block down a shoot where it would be churned together and sent out to machines for packaging. Now as you can probably imagine, as you are working at a butter factory your clothing ends up being caked in butter, and the staining and smell is almost impossible to remove! I tried to wash those jeans that I wore to that factory over and over again, but I could not get rid of that smell. As much as I tried it just was not going to come out.

Our hearts are stained with sin, and we can try our hardest to remove the guilt of our sin on our own, we can attempt to suppress the feelings of guilt or shame, we can do our best to cover up the sin, but we can't remove it. Only one thing removes sin: the holy, precious blood of Christ shed for sinners on the cross. By faith in Jesus, which the Spirit forms in our hearts, we receive the forgiveness of sins that Christ won through his innocent suffering and death. From beginning of life to the end we find ourselves totally relying on God's grace!

As soon as we enter into this world, we are covered in the stench of sin and need cleaning! David made that truth evidently clear in the verses just before our verse for consideration tonight as he said, I was sinful at birth, but even before that sinful at the time of conception! But David doesn't only talk about us being stained by the stench of what we would call original sin, he also speaks to the fact that we continually turn from God! My sin is always before me! I have sinned against the Lord and done what is evil in his sight, and we need to be reminded of this, because if we aren't we forget just how badly we need cleansing from our Saviour.

Sometimes as we talk about preparing ourselves to come to the altar of God and receive communion we say a good practice is to take a look at the ten commandments and see how our lives have lined up against those commandments. Have you tried that? Gone down the list commandment by commandment and honestly asked, how do I line up against God's expectations? This can be a healthy spiritual exercise at times, because one of the things that it leads us to discover about ourselves, is we are covered in sin.

If you were to go out on the streets tonight and interview people, going down the list of ten commandments and ask one by one how people have done with each, I would be willing to bet that you would get to certain commandments and they would say, well I've done pretty well carrying out this one!

Now lets imagine the first person that you talk to is a Christian, and they take a look at the first commandment, you shall have no other God's...easy! Let's move on to the next one! I'm not like the Israelite people, I haven't fashioned a golden calf and bowed down to it, and since I've never bowed down in reverence to any wood or stone fashioned statue we can check this one off as kept! That is, until we look a little more deeply. It turns out that God wants not only our outward worship but also that we be completely devoted to him and serve him with everything we do every moment of our lives. So anytime I sin - do anything that goes against God's will, I'm putting my desires above God, I'm bowing down to self in worship.

And we could keep going on through each of these commandments, fifth commandment, "you shall not murder." I'm not like David I've never killed anyone in cold blood, I couldn't! But Scripture says everyone who has hated is a murderer...That gets scary, because I sure have had hateful thoughts! Eighth commandment, you should not give false testimony against your neighbour... usually I tell the truth about others, but we are supposed to

Speak the truth in love. O boy.. how many times have I not been able to hold my tongue and gossip about another person which leads to their reputation being harmed.

We could keep playing this game all night, start to take even just a quick look at the commandments and it only takes moments for us to realize that we are stained with sin! And my most desperate attempts to remove that stain of sin does not work, so we are cleansing to come to come apart from me, a removal of this stain separate of my own ability to create a clean heart!

Psalms 51 provides ample evidence that David understood his need for God to cleanse him. He pleaded with the Lord: **"Remove my sin with hyssop, and I will be clean. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow."** Hyssop was a middle eastern shrub that was part of the Old Testament cleansing rituals. The priest would use Hyssop kind of like a sponge and would dip it into either blood or water, and then sprinkle it on either items in the temple or on people as a ceremonial cleansing before God! Hyssop was used to mark the door posts of their house at the time of the Passover as the lamb of sacrifice was slaughtered and the blood was to be painted on the doorposts. Cleansing with hyssop symbolized the cleansing that David would receive, that you received through the blood of Christ!

Sin is an irremovable stain on our own, and if that stain is not dealt with, it will cause us to fall away from God, and face eternal death. By the message of forgiveness in Christ, God treats the deadly stain of sin born in each one of us. He cleanses us in Christ. He washes us. He makes us whiter than snow.

The only way to have the infection of sin removed from us is through the blood of Christ. Promised from the very beginning we walk with this Saviour to the cross as he goes willingly to remove the stain of sin! Perfect life was the necessary task and blood on the cross was the required cleanser. On the day we were baptized, we were plunged beneath the cleansing blood of Jesus, who removed the guilty stains of sins. Through faith in our Saviour Jesus, though we as criminal as that man being crucified next to Jesus, God made us clean in his sight. No longer are we guilty. Instead, God justified us by his grace, declaring us innocent in his sight because of our Saviour's sacrifice. In Christ alone God cleansed us and cured us of the sin with which we were born. We rely entirely on God's grace in Christ.

You know when you remove a stain from something, often you can still see a bit of residue left behind? That is not how Scripture describes the cleansing nature of God's forgiveness towards you. Rather God hides his face from our sin so that he no longer sees it, he blots it out of the record book, he washes us, makes us whiter than snow, through the blood of the lamb of God.

Each year we solemnly walk the journey with Jesus to the cross as we take in the Passion history. It is a blessing to hear again the suffering our Lord Jesus endured in our place as he carried our burden of sin. It is a privilege for us to see him—as gruesome as it may be to our human senses—beaten and scourged, spit on and mocked, and finally nailed to a cross and forsaken by God the Father as our substitute - this reminds us of the ugly nature of our sin so that we do not take sin lightly, but in that suffering is our comfort. In that punishment is our hope. In those wounds are the grace of God on which we rely.

Yes, it is true that stains can be very difficult to get out. The spiritual stain of sin that we could never remove, God removed completely in the cleansing blood of Christ. When we as God's people recognize what he has done for us in Christ, we are eager to come and serve God, remaining faithful to him throughout this life, rejoicing in the salvation that is ours as we rely entirely on God's grace.