

Worship in All Circumstances: Guilt

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. My name is Eric. For those of you who don't know me, I'm one of the guys on staff here at Watermark Church. The year was 1997. There's a new magazine out called Backwoods Homes Magazine.

It was a new magazine, which means that the classified section didn't always get filled up. And in the times when they were short on classified ads, the editor would get one of his friends to come and fill up the extra space with riddles and jokes.

One week when they were short on classified ads, the friend who typically told the riddles and jokes asked if instead he could submit a couple of personal classified ads for free.

And the editor said, sure, why not? So the first ad was an ad for a girlfriend. He was looking for someone to be the love of his life and decided this magazine might be the place to look.

The second one, which you can see on the screen behind me, said wanted. Somebody to go back in time with me. This is not a joke. P.O. Box 322, Oakview, California, 93022.

[1 : 11] You'll get paid after we get back. Must bring your own weapons. Safety not guaranteed. I have only done this once before. Now, he didn't really expect many responses from this.

However, in the 20 years that have gone by since posting this ad, he continues to get responses to this letter. He has gotten responses from every continent, including Antarctica.

And some people just want to go back in time for the thrill of it. He said a surprisingly high number of people actually believe that the ad was real. Some people want to go back in time just for the excitement.

Who wouldn't want to go back and see parts of the past? But most of the letters that he has received in response to this ad have been people who want to go back and undo a tragedy in their lives.

He said that he has received several dozens of letters from people in prison who want to go back in time and stop themselves from committing the crime that put them there in the first place.

[2 : 15] One lady even wrote to him and asked if she could go back in time and stop the hitman that she hired to kill her husband. Out of all of the responses that this man has received from this ad, very, very few are from people who want to go back and relive a positive, happy moment from their lives.

Most of them are from people who want to go change a tragedy and stop it from happening because those times are the times that have stuck with them and haunted them throughout their lives.

And I'm guessing that each of us here today has one or two moments in our lives that if we had the chance and we had a time machine that we could go back and undo those moments, we would. You know, I'm hoping that no one in here has hired a hitman to kill their spouse. But all of us have things that follow us and haunt us. For me, I have a handful of moments that I think I wish I could go back and undo them.

One of them happened a couple summers ago. I was back visiting home and as kids, one of my younger brothers used to intentionally try to annoy me a lot.

[3 : 27] And he's grown up since then, but it's been years since we've lived under the same roof. So in my mind, he was still that same annoying little kid. And while I was home visiting, he did a couple things that just bothered me, you know?

And I decided, I'm tired of him intentionally bothering me. I'm an adult now. I don't need to put up with this. I'm going to say something to him that will make him stop.

And so as we were loading into the van to go celebrate my cousin's wedding, I lashed out at him. And I sent a very clear message that I am tired of you trying to annoy me.

We got to the wedding and I celebrated because it's a day for celebration and didn't really pay much attention to my brother until we got home that evening.

And we're hanging out as a family and my mom came up to me and she said, Hey, Eric, you need to go talk to your brother. I said, What? What's going on? And she said, He's up in his room and he won't come down because of what you said to him this morning.

[4 : 31] And so I went up to talk to him and I still, from time to time, see that image in my head of my brother lying on his bed in tears because of the impact that my words had on him.

And it's painful to know that my words cause such pain to someone that I love. And if I could go back in time, that's one of the moments that I wish I could go undo, take back those words that I've said.

But as we all know, I can't. And I'm sure that each of us has moments in our lives, big and small, where we've failed, where we've messed up, where we have sinned.

Sin is rebellion against God. And times that, if possible, we would want to go back and change. And today we're continuing our series on the Psalms and talking about worship in all seasons of life.

And we're talking today about Psalm 51, a psalm for the seasons when we are guilty. And what we're going to see is that in our moments of sin, in our moments of rebellion against God, we need forgiveness that can only be found in Jesus.

[5 : 42] So we're going to have three points. First, sin, the heart of the matter. Second, the only solution. And third, the life-changing conclusion. And then we're going to conclude the sermon by taking communion together.

Normally we take it earlier in the service, but today we're going to take it at the end. So the sermon itself will be the communion intro. But first, we're going to talk about sin, the heart of the matter. Now the Psalms, the book of Psalms, is a collection of songs that were sung by Israel in the Old Testament to worship God. Here we have songs.

We just finished singing some songs. And we keep our songs stored on the computer back there so that we can put them on the screen here. In the Old Testament, they collected their songs in a book, which is now known as the book of Psalms.

And as with many songs, something often happens that inspires someone to write a song. And in the book of Psalms, some of the songs have little notes at the start that tell us why that song was written.

[6 : 48] And this is one of them. It says, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Now if you've grown up in church, this next couple minutes is going to be a review.

But it's important. And if you haven't grown up in church, this is very important to understanding this psalm. The background of why this psalm was written is very important for us to understand what's being talked about in this psalm.

Now David was a king of Israel back in the Old Testament, in the earlier part of the Bible. And he was an amazing man.

God himself said of David that he was a man after God's own heart. Now the number of people that God speaks that highly of is very small.

But God himself said, This man, David, is a man after my own heart. If I search out the world for people who love me, who follow me with all of their hearts, this is one of the few.

[7 : 53] David became the king of Israel and he led the nation well. He led the army to conquer foreign lands. He led the people in worshipping God. He had established his kingdom. Things were going well.

And then, one night, his armies were out at war, fighting battles. But for some reason, which we don't know, he was at home. He was taking a walk on his rooftop.

And as he looked down over the edge, he saw a woman taking a bath on a neighboring rooftop. And he called all his servants and said, Who's that one? And they said, She's Bathsheba.

She's the wife of one of your soldiers in your army. And David said to himself, Hmm, she's married to a soldier in the army. It means her husband's away, so she's probably lonely.

And she's hot. Go grab her. Have her come over here. And Bathsheba came over and spent the night with King David. Now, by all appearances, it seems that David probably was expecting this to just be a one-night stand, have a little fun, and then move on with life.

[9 : 01] However, not long after this, he received news that Bathsheba was pregnant, which created a problem because her husband had been gone fighting in the army for months and wouldn't be home for a few more months.

And so there was no way that Bathsheba's husband would believe this baby was his. David was going to be in trouble. And so he came up quick on his feet with a plan to cover his tracks. He sent a messenger to the leader of the army and said, Hey, I want to hear an update on how things are going. Send Bathsheba's husband back here to update me. So Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, comes in, updates David on how things are going in the army, and David says, Thanks for the update.

Go spend the night at home, and I'll see you in the morning. And Bathsheba's husband says, No, king, I can't do that. It's not fair to the other soldiers that I get to go see my wife and have a nice night at home while they're out fighting the battles.

I'm just going to go down to your servants' quarters and sleep there. So David's like, Okay. Plan B. The next night, David keeps Bathsheba's husband around again and gets him very drunk.

[10 : 17] And then at the end of the night, he says, All right. Go home. Spend the night with your wife. It's going to be a good night for you. However, even though drunk, Bathsheba's husband is still aware enough to say, No.

I can't do this to my fellow soldiers. I'm going to sleep in the servants' quarters. And again, he goes down and spends the night in the servants' quarters. And David at this point realizes, I'm not going to be able to cover this up.

Uriah is too good of a man to go spend the night with his wife when all of his other soldiers that he fights alongside of are out at battle. I need to take more drastic measures to cover up what I've done.

So he writes a letter to the commander of the army and he says, Here's what I want you to do. Take Bathsheba's husband, put him in the part of the fighting where it's the most intense, and once he is there, pull all the other soldiers back so he is alone in the front in the most intense area of fighting. He writes the letter. He seals it up. He hands it to Bathsheba's husband, who has no idea what's inside it, and says, Deliver this to your commander. And Uriah, as a loyal, obedient subject, carries this note with his death sentence in it to the commander of the army, who obeys his king.

[11 : 39] The news comes to David that Uriah has been killed, and Bathsheba mourns her husband, and then as soon as possible marries King David, and nine months after that first fateful night, a baby is born, and David may have felt kind of bad about it, but probably not too bad because he got away with it, right?

He has a new wife added to his collection of wives, and she's really pretty. They have a new baby. No one knows about what he's done wrong. Things are looking good until a knock comes on the door, and in walks Nathan the prophet, and he says, King David, I've heard a story about something that's going on in your kingdom.

You're going to want to hear about this. And David says, Okay, tell me what's going on. Nathan says, There were two men. One of them was very wealthy.

He had lots of sheep, lots of land, lots of servants. The other one was a very poor man. He had only one young lamb, but this lamb was precious to him.

It would eat at the table with his family. It was like a daughter to him. And one day, a visitor came to visit this rich man, and the rich man needed to feed his guest.

[13 : 04] And rather than taking one of his lambs from the many that he had, he went and took the poor man's lamb and killed it and fed it to his guest. And David became furious.

He said, He said, The man who did this deserves to die. And he has to repay the poor man four times for what he stole.

This is terrible. I cannot believe that this is happening in my kingdom. And after what I imagined was a dramatic pause, Nathan responds to King David, You are the man.

God has given you everything you could have ever wanted. And rather than living thankfully, you decided to go out and steal your neighbor's wife and have your neighbor murdered to cover it up.

And in a moment, clarity comes to David, and he realizes, I have sinned. And this psalm that we're looking at today, Psalm chapter 51, is David's response after this conversation with Nathan.

[14 : 18] Now, I'm guessing that if ever there was a moment in history where someone wished they had a time machine that they could go back and undo their actions, it was David in that

conversation with Nathan.

And yet he didn't. And so we have this psalm, Psalm chapter 51, David's response when he recognizes the fact that he has sinned by stealing his neighbor's wife and having his neighbor murdered to cover it up.

And when we look at Psalm 51, the thing that we'll see is that David's first response when he recognizes his sin is to run to God and plead for mercy.

Verses one and two say, Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love. According to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

There's no excuses for why he did what he did. There's no blame shifting. There's simply an acknowledgement that I have sinned and I need help.

[15:27] So God, please help me. I think the reason David responds this way is because he recognizes that the heart of the matter in his sin is the matter of the heart.

The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart. He recognizes, I'm not some good person who just messed up and had a bad day and did a bad thing.

No. I have a wicked heart that led me to sin against my neighbor and against God. And this is a response that's rare, especially in our world today.

If you think about the ways that people respond when they're caught doing something wrong in the world today, so often it's different than this. In the world, we cover up what we've done. Like Bill Clinton.

I did not have sexual relations with that woman. David doesn't do that. He confesses, I have sinned. Or, in the world today, when people get caught doing things they shouldn't be doing, we try and brush it off as an inconsistency.

[16:32] I'm generally a good person. I just, you know, had a bad day. Like Usher, the musician, when he was caught cheating on his wife. His response is fantastic.

I was faithful at heart, but not faithful all the way. It's like the Princess Bride. I was only mostly faithful, not all faithful.

Or the actress, Kristen Stewart, when she was caught having an affair with a married director. She labeled it as a, quote, momentary indiscretion. I'm normally a good person.

I just had a bad moment. Or Tiger Woods, when it was revealed that he had been cheating on his wife with several different women. He said, I felt I had worked hard my entire life and deserved to enjoy all the temptations around me.

I was unfaithful, I had affairs, I cheated. Yes, I did a bad thing, but it was because I'm such a good person and a hard worker that I felt that I deserved to get away with a few bad things.

[17:38] This is how we typically respond in our world when we are caught in our sin. We deny it, we make excuses, we say that it's not in line with our true character, and David, in Psalm 51, does none of these things.

If you look at verse 5, he says, Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. He says, I'm not a good person who just made a bad decision.

He says, I have been a sinner since the day that I was conceived. And this action that I just did is in line with my character because I am rebellious and stubborn.

You shouldn't be amazed that I can mess up this badly. No, you should be amazed that I don't mess up this badly all the time because I know how messed up my heart is.

Because the heart of the matter is the matter of my heart. I acted out wickedly because I had a wicked heart. David comes to God with brutal honesty, confessing his sin and begging God to do something to make it right.

[18:53] However, David's problem is too big for David alone to fix, which means that he must look outside himself for a solution.

Which brings us to point to the only solution. He knows that his sin is his biggest problem, that his heart that leads him to sin is his biggest problem.

He's created problems that he could never make right. no matter how hard David tried, there's nothing that he could do to bring Uriah back from the dead and give him back his wife.

No amount of hard work, no amount of sacrifices, no amount of anything can undo the pain and destruction that David has caused through his actions. And even if there was something that he could do, he still recognizes that he has a wicked heart and his wicked heart is what led him to

these actions in the first place and changing his behavior is not going to change his heart. Behavior modification doesn't lead to a transformed heart. And so for David's situation to have a positive solution, he needs that solution to come from someone outside himself.

[20 : 11] But the question is, who outside of David is big enough to fix David's problem? Think about it, he's the king. There's no earthly authority, no person on earth who has the authority to pardon him.

He is the highest authority in the land. It's not like he can go to the king and get a pardon. He is the king. And, if you look at the Old Testament law, God makes provisions for people to get forgiveness for lots of sins.

If you rob your neighbor, you make some sacrifices, you pay the neighbor back, and you're good. For adultery, there is nothing that you can do. The sentence is death. For murder, there is nothing that you can do.

The sentence is death. And David hadn't done one or the other of these, he had done both of them. And so he comes to God and he says in verse 16, you would not delight in sacrifice or I would give it.

You will not be pleased with a burnt offering. God, if there's anything that I could do to make things right, I would do it, but I know that I can't.

[21 : 25] I know that there's nothing within my power that I can do to fix my situation. So God, I'm turning to you because you are the only one that can make this right.

He turns to God and he begs for a deep, deep mercy. If you look at the first two verses again and look at the words that David uses in his request to God, he says, have mercy on me, O God.

This word mercy means to take pity and show kindness that he does not deserve. He says, according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions.

This word blot out, it's like if someone was writing an accusation in wax with a sharp instrument and as they're writing, instead of continuing writing, they turn the instrument and use the long edge to wipe out everything they've just written and erase any record that those accusations had ever been written.

David says, God, please do that for me. I know that I am guilty, but wipe out any evidence that I have ever done this wrong. He says, wash me thoroughly from my iniquity.

[22 : 38] The picture here, the literal translation of that is multiply to wash me. The picture is of laundry with a stain on it, a big stain, and you need to wash this.

And when you wash it, the stain is still there, so you wash it again and again and again and again and again until the stain is gone. David says, God, wash me over and over and over and over until the stain of my guilt is gone.

and then he says, cleanse me from my sin. This word cleanse is a ceremonial picture of him saying, God, make me clean so that I can come into the temple and worship you because the Israelites needed to be ceremonially clean before they could come in and worship God.

And David says, God, bring me back to a place where I can join with your people and worship you despite my sin despite my guilt.

And something I want to just note quickly, we've been talking a lot in our series on the Psalms on the importance of honesty, being honest with God and being honest with ourselves about what's happening in our lives, where we're struggling.

[23 : 54] And one thing I want us to see today is that if we want to make true progress in our fight against the sin inside of us, we need to be honest with ourselves and with God about that sin.

And David sets an amazing example of that in this chapter. You know, in my life, I have this tendency to downplay the sin inside me. I don't like to see the true depths of sin in my heart.

When I speak words intended to hurt someone and they get offended, my initial response isn't to think, wow, I'm the type of person who speaks words intended to hurt. My initial response is, they're so sensitive, I can't believe they get upset over that.

When in all honesty, the words that I spoke were spoken with the goal of hurting them. And as long as I brush off my sin as other people's problem, as inconsistencies within me, I'm never going to grow, I'm never going to make progress in becoming more like Jesus.

And David here recognizes that. God, and he comes to God with brutal honesty and sets us an amazing example of the type of honesty that we should bring in our confession to God.

[25 : 11] Not brushing away our problems, not ignoring them, not blaming them on others, but taking full responsibility, but then turning to God and begging for mercy.

But even though David sets us this great example of honesty that still doesn't solve his problem of where his solution is going to come from. Because you see, here's the problem. David here, he confesses his sin.

In verse 4, he says, against you and you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. He praises God's justice. Which, oh by the way, demands that David die. And then he turns around in the next breath and pleads to God for mercy. Now there's a problem here.

Because God's justice demands a payment for what David has done. God's justice demands death for the adultery and murder that David has committed.

[26 : 19] And yet David turns to God and he says, God, cleanse me. God, forgive me. God, and it appears at least on the surface that David is calling on God to go against his own character.

God, ignore your justice so that I can be saved. So how is it possible that God can satisfy his justice and still show this mercy and forgiveness to David?

David? Well, if you go back to the story of Nathan's confrontation with David, when David confesses, I have sinned, Nathan tells David, you will not die, but the child born from your relationship will die.

And about a week later, the baby that Bathsheba had had after that night with David died. And you know what?

The death of that baby still did not satisfy God's need for justice because just like David, that baby was born as a sinner. However, about a thousand years after David's sin, another descendant would be born from the line of David.

[27 : 46] And this descendant would be named Jesus, which means the Lord is salvation. And Jesus would live 33 years of perfect obedience to God.

And after 33 years of perfect obedience to God, Jesus would stand on trial before a man named Pilate. And as the crowds shout out, crucify him, crucify him, crucify him, Pilate utters words that are eerily reminiscent of the words that Nathan spoke to David.

Nathan said, you are the man. And as the crowds cry out, crucify him, crucify him, Pilate shouts out to the crowds, behold the man, Jesus.

Hours later, Jesus is hung up on a cross. He dies. The one person in history who had lived the perfect life, the one person in history who did not deserve that death, is killed.

And in that moment, as Jesus hung on the cross, God's justice for David's sin was satisfied because a debt of death was paid by someone who didn't owe it himself.

[29 : 14] And yet at the same moment, God's mercy is able to be shown to David because that debt was paid by a willing substitute. Jesus was the only solution to David's sin.

He was the perfect solution to David's sin. And just as Jesus was the only solution to David's sin and the perfect solution for David's sin, Jesus is also the way that God can be just today and yet show mercy to you and me in the moments of our sin and failure.

If you're not a Christian here today, I urge you to trust in Jesus for this forgiveness that God offers us. So we have the heart of the problem in sin.

We have the only solution in Jesus, but then we have a life-changing conclusion. If you look at verse 12 and 13, it says, restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will return to you. What we see right here is that David promises God, if you forgive me, then I will live my life on mission.

[30 : 39] We have these signs up on the stage every week, gospel, community, mission. And there is a community aspect to this too, but for the sake of time, we're going to skip over that today. But what we believe here at Watermark is that as we believe the gospel, which is that good news about the forgiveness that's available to us in Jesus, that that transforms our hearts and leads us to live life in community and on mission, going out and telling others this good news about the forgiveness and life and hope available to us through the sacrifice of Jesus.

And David says to God, if you will forgive me, I will go and tell everyone about how amazing and fantastic you are and how great your forgiveness is.

God bless you and if you're here today and you're a Christian, I want to ask you, how are you doing with sharing your faith? My challenge to you, share your faith this week.

And I know we usually want to focus on heart change, not just action change, but this is an action that reveals what's in our hearts. I talk to many Christians, including myself, yeah, I talk to myself, who have trouble with this idea of sharing our faith.

It feels awkward, it feels uncomfortable, and I'm going to throw this out there. I think the reason so many of us have trouble sharing with others about who Jesus is is because we haven't experienced the type of forgiveness that David is experiencing right here.

[32 : 17] I'm not talking about forgiveness for adultery and murder, no, I'm talking about forgiveness that goes down to the core of who we are. Forgiveness that confesses that we're not good people who just had a bad moment, but we're sinners to the core of our being and we need God to rescue us from the inside out.

I have lived so much of my life with this feeling that I'm generally a good person who just needs God to come in and help me out around the edges when I make my occasional mess ups.

And living my life with that attitude has led to pride, it's led to shame in the moments where I do mess up, and it's led to a fear of sharing my faith because what will others think if they know that I do occasionally mess up?

And the amazing news of the gospel, the amazing message of this chapter is that all of us are desperately messed up from the moment that we were conceived inside our mother's wombs. people who need salvation from outside of us.

[33 : 28] It can be tempting to look at David and think, how could he? How could he steal his neighbor's wife and then have his neighbor murdered to cover up for him?

But if I'm being totally honest, the attitudes inside his heart that led him to do those things are all present in my heart. Lust, self-centeredness, and overwhelming urge for self-preservation, all of these things are present in my heart.

There's nothing about what David did that's any worse than the desires inside my heart, and I'm guessing all of our hearts. All of us are sinful like David.

All of us need mercy like David, but all of us have a Savior in Jesus who has come to forgive us and make us anew.

And when we realize how desperately wicked we are and how amazingly, abundantly merciful he is, that should lead to joy. Because when we realize that we're worse than we ever dreamed, but we are more loved than we could ever have hoped, we realize that we are free.

[34 : 47] And when we're joyful about something, we want to share that with others. That's our natural response as humans. Which is why David says, God, I'm a sinner. I need your mercy.

But when I receive it, when I see how abundant your forgiveness is, I will share with others about how great and forgiving you are. And so my challenge for us today is to be honest with ourselves and with God about the sin in our hearts, to turn to Jesus as the only solution for our problem, and then to live our lives on mission as a response to what God has done for us.

And something that's really cool to me about this passage is that with David, the sinful thing that he did, it could have crushed him.

It could have caused him to go run into a hole and hide because he didn't want anyone to see his face after knowing how messed up he was. But instead, God takes this moment of terrible decisions and terrible consequences and uses it for something good and beautiful in David's life.

He uses the sin to lead David to share with people of his day and with us about how great God's forgiveness is.

[36 : 19] And that same pattern of God taking these things, these times of sin in our lives and making something beautiful out of them carries through today as well.

The amazing truth is that God takes our sins and makes them beautiful by using us as canvases where he can paint masterpieces of his mercy for the watching world to see.

He paints masterpieces of his mercy in our lives for the watching world to see so that as we are forgiven, as we trust in this good news, others can be drawn to him as well.

And you know, God knows that we're forgetful people. This message is so simple. We're messed up. Jesus saves us. Yay.

And yet in my life, I forget that so often. I forget step one, that I'm messed up. And I think I'm an okay person. In the moments where I do mess up, I forget that Jesus saves me.

[37 : 30] And then I forget to be thankful and celebrate him. And God, knowing how forgetful we are, has built into the rhythm of the church's life, certain things to remind us of his great love and his

great mercy.

And one of those things is communion. As we gather for communion, this is a time that God has given us to remind ourselves and to proclaim to the world around us the fact that Jesus is our only solution.

As we eat the bread that's a picture of Christ's body for us, and as we drink the wine that's a picture of his blood, it's a way of physically reminding ourselves of the fact that the blood of Jesus is perfect, is enough to forgive us for our sins.

And as we eat the bread and drink the wine, we're showing those around us and proclaiming to the world around us that we do believe that the blood of Jesus is all we need to forgive us for our sins. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.