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The Way of True Repentance; Psalm 38  
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Introduction – It was October 31, 1517 when a little known lecturer of theology had the audacity to challenge the entire church over the issue of penance and indulgences. What drove Martin Luther to make such a bold stance against the Roman Catholic church was foremost a pastoral concern. When he observed the collecting of indulgences with the promise of forgiveness and release from purgatory, knowing these funds were being used to build St. Peter's basilica, Luther knew the pope was robbing the poor to finance his church. So when John Tetzel, the famous indulgence collector, rolled into Wittenberg shouting "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs," Luther knew something must be done.

For not only was the pope robbing the poor, the nature of true repentance was being horribly distorted. The pope or the priest could not grant forgiveness, only God can grant forgiveness of sin. Repentance did not come through payments and other acts of penance, repentance came through the heart and displayed itself in outward conformity to the will of God. Repentance could not be enacted by papal authority, but must be granted by God.

So the initial thrust for the Protestant Reformation was a call to biblically correct the way we understand true repentance. Luther was absolutely right in his first point of his famous 95 Thesis to state that the life of a believer is one of repentance. Initial repentance occurs at conversion when we repent of our sins and trust Jesus for forgiveness. Then there is ongoing repentance that occurs daily in the life of a believer as part of our sanctification. We are constantly turning from sin, changing the way we think and act from worldliness and selfishness to godliness.

What we find in Psalm 38 is a clear OT example of true repentance that is also ongoing repentance. There are 4 components of true repentance found in our text today. Let us be certain that we understand repentance correctly and that when we say we are repenting from sin that we are indeed actually repenting from sin and not simply tossing a token coin to God, not simply verbalizing something that we have not internalized, not simply going through a motion that in and of itself has no saving value.

## I. True Repentance Acknowledges Actual Guilt

- a. If we are to truly change and live to the glory of God, then we must be sincere and gut-level honest about our situation. We must not shy from calling our sin, sin. We must move from pride to humility and do away with candy-coating sin or our feeble attempts at portraying our sin as not so sinful. Sin is an act of defiance, rebellion, disobedience and idolatry toward God. It is a falling short of His glory. It is an act of wickedness, of iniquity, of transgression. Sin is not weakness, it is not just the way I am or how I've been treated, or the way I'm wired, or an illness, or a diagnosis. Sin is sin, and if we are going to know true repentance, and therefore know true forgiveness, and therefore know true restoration, we must truthfully acknowledge our guilt and call our sin exactly what it is, sin against our holy, loving, worthy God.
- b. That's exactly what David does in Psalm 38. Vv3b-5.
- c. We have to own up to our sin, admit our sin in order for true repentance to occur. But we would rather soften it into something other than sin or we would love to lay the blame for our sin at another's feet.
- d. That's precisely what Adam and Eve did when God called them to account for their disobedience. Adam said, "Eve made me do it." Eve said, "The serpent made me do it." And just like Adam and Eve, we come up with all kinds of excuses and all kinds of ways to rationalize and justify and argue that our sin is not really sin.
- e. The problem of course is when we fail to acknowledge and admit our guilt before God, we don't have repentance, and if we don't have repentance, we are not right with God.
- f. Ill. 2 Sam 12 – v13 "I have sinned against the Lord."
- g. True repentance acknowledges actual guilt.

## II. True Repentance Expresses Genuine Sorrow

- a. True repentance is not just being sorry that you got caught. It's not just being regretful that you find yourself bearing the consequences of your sin. True repentance carries with it a godly sorrow. Those who truly repent are genuinely distressed and grieved that they have insulted and betrayed the grace and mercy of God. When we sin we act as if God is not enough, that He does not sufficiently satisfy, that we want something other than God. And to heap injury upon insult, we turn to something lesser,

something vile. We worship self rather than God. And finally when the conviction of the Holy Spirit rattles us from our sinful slumber, we ache with regret and cry with sorrow for biting the hand that so lovingly and tenderly cares for our every need.

- b. Vv17-18.
- c. 2 Cor 7:10 – For godly grief produces repentance that leads to salvation without regret.
- d. If we were to ask ourselves when was the last time I truly repented of my sin, we could answer that question by asking when was the last time I was wept over my sin, when was the last time I was truly sorry for my sin? When was the last time that it hit me like a massive bolder that my sin of a sharp tongue, my sin of outburst anger, my sin of a lustful eye, of a critical word, of a prideful heart, of a view of pornography, of worrying and not trusting my Father, my sin, that particular sin that I committed is exactly the same sin for which Jesus died. He bore God's wrath to pay for that sin of mine that I so carelessly, selfishly, willingly pursued. It was my unnecessary sin that made the death of the Son of God so necessary.
- e. True repentance expresses genuine sorrow.

### III. True Repentance Understands Utter Dependence

- a. When we are awakened to our sin, we are also awakened to the fact that it is beyond our power to repair what we have broken.
- b. I don't have the power within myself, I'm already broken. Vv8-10.
- c. My loved ones are not endowed with the ability to deal with my sin. My sin often ostracizes them from me. V11
- d. My enemies will surely provide no relief from the guilt of sin. They will only seek to add to it. V12
- e. I am utterly dependent upon God to be gracious and merciful and forgiving to me. V15.
- f. But you know the thing about being dependent on the grace and mercy and forgiveness of God is that He is gracious and merciful and forgiving.
- g. You see the truth about true repentance is that it, just like faith, is a gift from God.
  - i. Acts 5:31 – God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

- ii. Acts 11:18 – Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.
    - iii. 2 Tim 2:25 – Says the Lord’s servant must correct “his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.”
  - h. Repentance does not originate within us. Repentance comes from God. If we find our lives are lacking in true repentance then we must go to God and ask Him, to use Augustine’s words, if He would grant that which He requires.
  - i. True repentance understands utter dependence.
- IV. True Repentance Turns in Faith to the Lord
- a. A truly repentant heart knows that we cannot be made right with God unless God makes us right with God. But a truly repentant heart also knows that faith in the Lord is never wasted.
  - b. Vv21-22
  - c. There are two marvelous and deep and treacherous chasms that David crosses over in this beautiful psalm.
    - i. The first chasm is the crossing from v1 where David cries “O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger” to v22 where David cries “Make haste to help me.” What carried David across that chasm from “rebuke me not” to “help me” was the God-given gift of true repentance – admitting his guilt, sorrow over his sin, dependence upon God, and faith in his Lord.
    - ii. The second chasm is the crossing from v3 where David says “my sin” to v22 where David says “O Lord, my salvation.” What carried David across the chasm from “my sin” to “my salvation” was true repentance.
  - d. True repentance turns in faith to the Lord

Conclusion – In Psalm 38 it is so evident that David is crushed by his sin, the conviction of his sin. He says it is a heavy burden, my iniquities are too heavy for me. That’s why we need a Savior, who not only crushes us under our sin to wake us from our sinful slumber, but who will also remove our sin and make us whole. Job 5:17-18 – “Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty. For He wounds, but He binds up; He shatters, but His hands heal.” Whatever may be our sin today, let us arise and go to Jesus!