

Psalm 51: Have Mercy!

Read Psalm 51:1-2

The titles or introductions to the Psalms were apparently added later, so they are not usually considered part of the inspired text. But here Psalm 51 is said to be David's psalm after Nathan confronted him with his adultery with Bathsheba.

Sense the psalmist's urgency and desperation. He comes directly to the point and begs for God's forgiveness. He uses four different words (each is a single word in Hebrew) to ask for His pardon:

- The first word he blurts out is, "**Have mercy!**" (NIV, NRSV) or "**Be gracious!**" (NASB). One in need, completely helpless and undeserving, is begging for help from one able to give it. With this very first word, the psalmist sets the proper relationship between God and himself: "You are great, and I am not! I don't deserve Your forgiveness! I ask only because I know You are gracious and merciful!"
- "**Blot out** my transgressions" (v.1b). Erasures in ancient leather scrolls were made by washing or sponging off the ink. Here the psalmist is praying that God would erase all record of his sins. Why does he ask? Only because of God's great compassion and abundant mercies. He knows and feels within that he deserves no mercy at all.
- "**Wash me** thoroughly from my iniquity" (v.2a). Wash me as one would vigorously scrub dirty clothes until they are completely clean.
- "**Cleanse me** from my sin" (v.2b). Cleanse me as one would burn away the dross from metal, or completely eradicate a disease, or cleanse a temple by removing everything unholy.

Do you feel what the psalmist feels? He knows his need. He is deeply aware of his total unworthiness before God. He comes because God is truly merciful, and because He is the only one that can free him from the crushing weight of his sin.