

RESTORING THE SHRIVELED VISION



“We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God’, and hates his brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, how can he love God, whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God, should love his brother also.”

1 John 4:19-21

Of course, we can read this, and say to ourselves that we're not guilty. It's possible for us to pretend to ourselves, that we do indeed love our brother. But if this "love for our brother" is nothing other than a disguised form of self-love, if I only really love those who love me, if, in my heart of hearts, I have no love for those who give me a hard time, who continuously misconstrue my motives,

who withdraw when they see me coming, then sooner or later, that lovelessness in my heart is going to come spilling out with a jolt.

I'm going to find myself spewing anger, acting vindictively, forcing me to admit to myself that I am bankrupt of love; that my love has been paper-thin all along. My "good deeds" were actually driven by a well-disguised love for myself. While I was busy serving certain worthy people with a "loving heart," I was ignoring those whom my heart secretly despised.

When I begin to see this, to see this ugly thing which is the real me, what do I do?

I step back and observe that there is a basic twist in my soul which needs to be made whole. This lack of love for my brother, my family, my neighbor, is the result of a warped vision of God's love for me.

The spring of divine love in my heart began to dry up the minute my vision of God's love for me began to shrivel.

Until that vision of God's love for me comes back to size, until my heart once again beholds God's mercy, my efforts to practice love toward others are bound to fail.

I can get up in the morning determined to love my enemies,
to do good to those who persecute me, to pray for those who give me a hard time.
But I will fail.

First, this shriveled vision of God's love for me has to be restored to what it once was. I need to be able to see God's mercy in the face of his Son. To feel the rays of loving-kindness streaming from those eyes that never close, and those hands that never weary.

Consider David. David was far from perfect. Yet for all his ups and downs David was sustained by an overwhelming awareness of God's goodness. David was God-conscious. Whether he was fighting Goliath the giant, or battling the Philistines, David kept crying out to God for help. After he became king, God remained the anchor of his life. What thankfulness was in his heart when he was near God! What joy welled up within him when they brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem.

As long as David's vision of God's love was whole, he was given wisdom to direct the kingdom, and guide his people. But, there came a day when David's heart began to find other satisfactions. David began to get caught up in the exciting business of expanding his kingdom. He subdued the Philistines and conquered them. He took on the Moabites, (who were among his ancestors. His great-grandmother, Ruth, was a Moabite). Not only did David defeat the Moabites, he utterly humiliated them. The Moabite warriors were forced to lie down on the ground, while he measured them with a measuring rod. Two lengths of measuring rod were killed, one length was allowed to live, two more lengths were killed, one length was allowed to live.

David went on to defeat Hadadezer, extending the kingdom all the way to the Tigris and the Euphrates, in the east. He killed 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. David's heart is now taken up with the affairs of his expanding kingdom. And, of course, his image of himself, begins to expand. And as David becomes more important in his own eyes, his awareness of God's love begins to shrink.

And yet, a prophet had walked up to David and said, "You know, your Majesty, you don't have the vision of God's love that you once had,"

David would have denied it with a passion.

Then one afternoon as David was taking the air on the roof of the palace, he looked down and he saw a beautiful woman bathing on her rooftop below. "Who is she?" "Why, that's Bathsheba, the wife of the famous Uriah, the Hittite warrior". (Uriah, of course, is miles away fighting the Ammonites, in battle.) So David sends messengers down to bring Bathsheba to the palace---a thing which he would never have done, if his eye had been on God.

Some time later, a message comes to the palace from Bathsheba, "I am with child". David decides to do the expedient thing. He's not praying, he's not repenting, he's not asking God for help. He calmly sends a message to Joab, his commander, and directs him to send Uriah back to Jerusalem.

“Well, how’s the battle going Uriah? And by the way, why don’t you take some time with your wife?” “Oh no, I can’t do that,” answers Uriah, “How can I spend time with my wife, when my comrades are sleeping in the open field?” (Uriah has a sense of right and wrong. David has lost his.) So David takes one more step into the darkness: he sends a sealed message by the hand of Uriah, to Joab, his commander. “Put Uriah up where the battle is hot and withdraw.” Some time later, the message comes to Jerusalem, “Uriah is dead.” What a pity! After the formal period of mourning, Bathsheba is brought to the palace to be David’s wife. Still no repentance.

And no word from God, no rebuke, nothing---until the child is born. One day, Nathan the prophet comes to David, with a parable which David doesn’t even recognize as a parable, telling David about a wealthy man, who had all kinds of flocks. And what does this wealthy man do to provide a meal for some out-of-town guests? He steals a little ewe lamb from a poor man, the only animal he has, kills it, and serves it to his guests. David flies into a rage at the rich man’s lack of mercy! Nathan points his finger at David, “You are the man! You have killed Uriah with the sword of the Ammonites and have taken his wife for yourself. Hear my words! From now on the sword will never depart from your house!” At last David sees the light. He confesses his sin.

Of course, David knew what he was doing all along, but now he has no choice but to confess the truth. Isn’t this how we are so much of the time? We go right on doing this thing we know is out of God’s will, and telling ourselves, “Nothing’s wrong, nothing’s wrong, it’s OK. I’m justified.” Until finally, God, in his mercy, pushes us into a painful corner.

David is going to have to live with the consequences of his sin the rest of his life. But David doesn’t have time to sit around and mope. He knows that the one thing he has to do now is get back that vision of God he once had.

And so, David turns himself around---and may God give us the wisdom to do the same: to repent. The first half of Psalm 51 is David’s cry of repentance, his admission of guilt. David makes no attempt to justify himself.

***Have mercy upon me, O God,
according to thy loving kindness,
according to the multitude of thy tender mercies,
blot out my transgressions
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin
For I acknowledge my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me
Against thee, thee only, have I sinned
and done this evil in thy sight.
Psalm 51: 1-4***

Finally, when David faces reality, he makes no attempt to justify himself, or excuse what he did. He comes right out and confesses it to God.

The place where David went off the track was not when he took that dangerous detour with Bathsheba. David went off the track long before. It was when David allowed his vision of God’s mercy to become faded; when he began to lose sight of how good God had been to him.

It was when David no longer allowed his spirit to look with thankfulness at the Lord's boundless generosity to him---how the Lord anointed David king, delivered him from Saul's attacks, poured earth's riches into his bosom---it was then that David lost his way.

David needs not only to be forgiven for the sins of adultery and murder; David needs to come back to the place where, once more, he begins to give thanks for God's mercy. Until that happens, even if he is forgiven, David is going to retrogress.

And so will we. If we receive forgiveness for our sin but fail to take the next step of restoring our vision of God's mercy, our peace will be short-lived. We need to see God as supreme in our lives. Hence, Psalm 51:10 rises into a prayer that we need to pray in some form every day.

***Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from thy presence,
and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation
and uphold me with thy free spirit.
Psalm 51:10-12***

Three things David asks for:

a clean heart,

a right spirit,

and God's presence.

And these three things are given to David through the mercy of a son who is to come from David's own loins, through Bathsheba, ten centuries later.

A river of mercy is permitted by God to flow back through ten centuries, from the undisclosed future, and wash David's sin with the blood of his Son, God's Son, Yeshua, Jesus the Messiah; so that David might have a clean heart, that he might have a right spirit, that he might be brought into God's presence, be anointed with the Holy Spirit, restored to the joy of God's salvation, and upheld with God's free spirit.

Now, if God can do that for David, if he can give him a right spirit and a clean heart after what David did, if he can give him a new start, bring him back into his presence---surely, he can do as much for us.

These verses of Psalm 51, are the prayer that we need to pray as we climb Calvary hill on our hands and knees. And every time we break bread together and receive the body and blood of our Lord, this is our prayer:

First: *Create in me a clean heart*

an unmixed heart,
a heart that's no longer divided.

Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

If I'm having trouble seeing God, it's because my heart is mixed. I've allowed my heart to be side-tracked onto other things. If I seek it from him, God will give me a heart that is pure, centered only on him

"Lord God, you who created light out of darkness, create a new heart in the darkness of my soul."

God will do it.

Second: *Renew a right spirit within me*

a right mind,
a right attitude.

Of course, this begins with the admission that my mind has not been right. "I've been unmerciful, Lord, I've been hard, I've been judging, I've been critical, I've been deceitful.

Lord God give me a spirit like your own, a spirit that is merciful to the extent that it will not look covetously on another man's wife, or another woman's husband. It will not defame another person's name. It will not mislead those innocent sheep - a spirit that suffers long and is kind, does not exalt itself, is not puffed up, does not seek its own, does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.

Thirdly: *Cast me not away from your presence*

bring me back to yourself.

Many of us have cast ourselves away from God's presence, by allowing ourselves to be distracted. We have to come back. We may not be a David. We may not have had a kingdom to rule. And yet we are closer to David than we think.

David's kingdom was real, you could touch it, you could see it. Our kingdoms are imaginary. But how many of us have allowed ourselves to be distracted by the affairs of our "kingdom:" our reputation, our grasp of scripture, some new concept of the church that we're hot on, some new disciples that we're drawing to ourselves (instead of to the Lord Jesus); always expanding, always pushing out?

And as our "kingdom," expands, our vision of God's mercy shrivels. It may not be a Bathsheba, our lives on the surface may be morally sound, but we are losing our way. It's time to stop and cry out, "A new heart, Lord God! A right spirit, Lord! Bring me back into your presence! Whatever the cost!"

Why should we continue with these vain visions of ourselves while the vision of the Lord Jesus keeps shrinking within us? If we are willing to repent of our vanity and turn once again to the Crucified and Risen Lamb, who emptied himself of his glory and drained away our guilt with his own death, he will answer the cry of our hearts even as we read these words:

Lord! I'm thirsting for you alone. I'm crying out to you for....

A clean heart.

A right spirit.

Your very presence in my life,
as the Holy Spirit visits me afresh.

Your Kingdom, Lord!

Not mine.

Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another; the Lord heeded and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and thought on his name.

"They shall be mine says the Lord of hosts, my special possession on the day when I act, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him."

Malachi 3



THE LAMB
WHO WAS SLAIN
HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN

Maranatha Mirror Messages

To learn about us or to explore our archives

www.mmirror.net

To receive bi-weekly messages or to contact us

Email- **MaranathaMirror18@gmail.com**

Art: Create in Me A Clean Heart permission of Jen Norton www.JenNortonArtStudio.com