

Be Forgiven

I think of all the words that we use in the English language, the two words, I-- sorry, it's probably three words, really. They hold so much power. I happen to ask ChatGPT, my good friend, give me some songs that talk about saying sorry. Of course, the first one that came up was Brian Adams, please forgive me. Then we had Justin Bieber's, the one and only J Bieber's, is it too late to say that I'm sorry? It had Taylor Swift's back to December with the caveat written underneath it, here's a rare moment that Taylor owns her own mistakes. That's a bit raw in there. Ouch. Clearly, Chat is not a Taylor Swift fan. But finally, it had Justin Timberlake's, cry me a river. And underneath it, it wrote, this is less of an apology, more you should be sorry. Which led me to think that it is quite uncommon to say, I'm sorry. Would much rather you say you're sorry than I say, I'm sorry. I think it was Elton John that sang, sorry seems to be the hardest words. I think he's onto something there. Like the character from Happy Days, remember the fonts? If you're older than 40, you should know who the fonts is. Do you ever remember how whenever he was told that he was wrong or he had to say I'm sorry? This is how he would say it, he would say, Patsy, I'm zzzz, or Cunningham, I was woooo. You know, he found it too hard to say the words. But I've got a friend who's got the opposite problem. My friend Jenny always saying sorry. Oops, sorry. Oh, you hurt me. Sorry, you spilled drink on me. Sorry. See the fonts, he was so filled with pride that he couldn't say the words, sorry. Jenny, she was filled with another sort of pride. Fear of being wrong, fearful of what others people think of her. Her sorry was apologetic, but not always sincere. Because saying sorry is hard. It's hard to say I'm sorry, and it's very hard to say I'm sorry without qualifications. We might say I'm sorry if, but that's a qualification or I'm sorry, but that's a qualification. And yet we love to hear the words, I'm sorry. And if we need to be forgiven, we want to hear the words, you're forgiven. To be forgiven, we need to say I'm sorry. This morning we read from Psalm 51. The Bible reading was King David's private nightmare. But it was all his own doing. He has taken a woman and slept with her. He killed her husband to cover it up. A so-called man of God, this King David. But yet he is committed adultery and murdered. And if that wasn't bad enough, he has no remorse, no guilt, and no confession. So it took God to speak into his life through a prophet to make him realize that what he has done is actually catastrophic. David realizes now after the prophet speaks to him, the evil he has done and he's got nowhere to hide. Psalm 51 is his raw, honest, cry of repentance to God. And it can become our cry of repentance to God too. It can be our way of saying to God, I'm sorry. Let's learn from Psalm 51 from King David how to understand and truly apply repentance and forgiveness. And what do we learn from it? Well, from the first verse, we learn this. Here's the first thing we learn. We learn we need the love of God in order to be forgiven. In order to say sorry, we must appeal to the love of God. That's what King David does. The first thing he does in verse one, he appeals to God's love. According to your steadfast love and your abundant mercy, he says, have mercy on me. The word that David is appealing to, the characteristic, it's love. Love is probably the word most used to describe God. I wonder if when you think of God, it's the word you most describe. It's the God that you think of loving or is he only your burden, only your judge? Is he the one who's always on your back? Well, not according to the Bible. According to the Bible, the characteristic that most describes God is love. And it's the love that brings forgiveness. So to know God is to know the God who forgives. And he forgives generously, full of mercy. That's the first thing we need to remember. When we need to be forgiven, when we need to say, I am sorry to God, we need to remember that he is full of love to receive those words. But here's the second thing. The second thing we need in order to be truly forgiven is we need real humility,

humble humility. In the next few verses of Psalm 51, David, he realizes and admits that he is filthy. His sins are right before him and he's got nowhere to hide. You know, growing up, I came from an Anglican church. And in that Anglican church, we would very often read from the Australian prayer book, particularly 1979. And that's the best prayer book of all of them. Come and argue if you need to. But in the 1979 Australian prayer book, right before we would take the communion, there was this prayer called the prayer of humble access. If you're an Anglican, you know exactly what I'm talking about. The prayer of humble access. And it says these words, these are directly from the prayer book itself. It says, we do not presume to come to this, your table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness. But in your abundant and great mercies, we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. Now, when you pray these words, you can hear the humility in them. But it was what came next that really confused me as a child. In fact, it confused me so much that I refused to say the words. And I would look around saying, are we genuinely saying this to God? Because we're just said, we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. The next line, but you are the same Lord, whose character is always to have mercy. I'm not saying that to God. We're not worthy to gather up the crumbs, but you're the same Lord. You're not worthy to gather up the crumbs. I'd learned later that it was not saying that God is the same as us. He's not like us at all. I learned later that the same Lord is the same Lord who has always got the same character, always to have mercy. A God full of mercy. You see, this prayer is a prayer of humility, praying to the God who always has to have mercy. You see, we're not worthy. We don't want to presume on our own righteousness before God. We don't presume that we deserve to be forgiven. To receive forgiveness, we realize that we need forgiveness. To receive it, you need to realize that you need it. And the forgiveness, where does it come from? Well, it comes first from God. Before we think about the evils we've done to others, our sin is primarily before God. Have a look at Psalm 51 verse 4 with me. One of the most difficult lines to understand in this particular poem, David says, "It's against you and you only, Lord, that I have sinned and done what is wrong." How can David say it's only against God? Sin by definition can be anything. And we've just seen him commit adultery, take a wife that's not his, killed the faithful man of God that was her husband to cover up his sins. He's not initially realized he's done anything wrong. The sin is everywhere. How can he say it's against God only that he sinned? Well, sin by definition in the Bible is not primarily wronging another person. Sin by definition is assaulting the glory of God. It's rebelling against God. So when, you know, David says, "Against you and you only have I sinned," he's really saying, "My sin is a rebellion against God. I've rejected God as my treasure. In fact, I've scorned the Word of God, which is what the Prophet said to him. You've scorned the Word of God. What's more, I've also ruined his people." It's not that King David is minimizing the sin against Bathsheba and Uriah her husband. He's maximizing the hurt towards God. And that's true humility. True humility is realizing whatever we have done, when we sin, we've rejected God. And what about you? Would you say that your life is marked by embracing God and His Word or scawning God and His Word? When other people look at you, do they see someone who embraces God and His Word or do they see someone rejecting it? Humility recognizes the rejection of God and His Word. And the people He has created. I want to tell you a story about John. John, he's a churchgoing, taxpaying, pick up other people's rubbish in the street sort of bloke. John would be called a decent person. You probably know someone like John. A good bloke. Kind. But listen to John as he explains what happened in his life. He said, "I would go to church almost every week. I listened every week. The preacher would talk about being forgiven most weeks. However, I didn't ever feel like I needed to be forgiven." This is John himself speaking. He goes on, "I

honestly felt like there was not much to be forgiven for. And then it hit me like a freight train. I began to realize this feeling of being almost too good. Almost too good to need forgiveness was in fact sin. It was pride. I devoted my life to being better than others. Being more good, more nice, more morally superior than anyone else. And then it hit me hard. I realized it was pride against God. It was pride that was driving me. Not God. God wasn't driving me. Pride was. That was, he says, the first time I truly prayed. "Father, forgive me. I have sinned." John goes on to say that although he believed in God, the moment he prayed that prayer was like as where his faith first began. See the weight of all that pressure of trying to be nice and good coming from his own pride. It was released off his shoulders. He was less interested in what other people thought of him and more interested in what God thought of him. He realized he was an arrogant man that needed forgiveness. He says that's the beginning of his faith. It's a great story. I'm reminded of two people that go into the temple. One of them walks in quite full of pride. "Look at what I'm doing, God." And then another that cannot even look to heaven and says, "I don't even deserve to be here." And Jesus says, "It's the second that goes away forgiven." Not the first. In order to be forgiven, we need to remember God's love, but not presume upon it. We need humility. And here's the third thing we need. Repentance. David doesn't just feel bad about what he's done. That's remorse. David calls out to be changed. That's repentance. He cries out, "Create in me a clean heart." "Create in me a right spirit." He doesn't want the same heart. His same heart was broken and deceitful above all things. In fact, he says, "I was created evil at birth." What David cries out for in his repentance is a new heart, a new direction. I once met a man who was a schoolteacher alongside me, but he had been caught selling drugs to kids in his school and seeking to develop relationships with high school girls. Absolute terrible situation. He was sent to a, essentially a reprimand center where he was awaiting trial and I happened to meet him in my day-to-day life. And what struck me about the man was he was vocally in despair about what had happened. "I can't believe," I was doing those things, he said, "I can't believe that I've been caught. My life is going to change now. Look what's going to happen. I'm never going to be able to teach again. I'm going to have to go to jail for a period of time." The man was in despair. The thing is, I could not hear a word of repentance. It felt like the man was just upset that he got caught and he was upset at the consequences of what were going to happen. He had no desire to change. I think he had remorse, but he didn't have any repentance. But King David here in the verse in Psalm 51 reminds us, "The true forgiveness will come when true repentance occurs." "Creating me a clean heart." Of course, we know that King David, he can't change a heart. He can't clean his heart. He can't clean anyone's heart. None of us can. But we all know we have filthy hearts, right? What David is doing here is he's pointing us forward to a time thousands of years later where Jesus will come. Jesus brings a message, repent and believe the good news, the good news that is both forgiveness and a new heart. The clean heart David cries out for comes through belief and forgiveness from Jesus Christ. Such good news. Repentance is receiving the forgiveness of Jesus and turning around from your old ways, facing the direction of Jesus. That's what it means, turning around. It's not just wanting to deal with the feelings of badness. Repentance is actually changing direction. I think in the life of a Christian there's two types of repentance. There's that immediate first time, that time where you first turn around and say, "Jesus, I want to follow you." I put my trust in you. I believe in you. I think you can forgive me of my sins to God. I think your death on the cross is the punishment that I deserve and I want to take and receive forgiveness instead. And you turn back to Jesus. That's repentance. Not everyone does that. Some people like Jesus. Some people want to be a fan of Jesus. Some people want to look on to Jesus like some sort of hero. But they don't want to receive the forgiveness from Jesus.

Maybe that's because there's too much pride. And I wonder if you are like that person that likes Jesus, but does not receive forgiveness from Jesus. Well, when you repent and believe in him, and actually put your pride to the side and say, "I can't fix my own heart. Jesus, I want you to fix my heart." When you do that, that is faith in him. And you can't do that. That is faith in him. And that is where forgiveness is found. Repent and believe. That's a capital R repentance. That's the big deal. That's the person who turns from rejecting God to following God when they repent. Capital R repentance. It happens once in your life. But there's another type of repentance that goes on in our lives as a Christian. I've been a Christian for many years, and this other type of repentance happens day in and day out. Sometimes it takes a few weeks. And it's where I realize I've been living in a way that's against God. Because I believe in Jesus, and I follow him, but I also am torn and want to do the things that are against him. And I need to come back to God and say, "I am sorry." And that's the little R repentance. Sometimes it's weekly. Sometimes, you know, day to day, where I'm saying, "Lord, I confess what I've done is wrong. I repented those sins. I am sorry for them." Now, there's a big difference with what happens with the big R repentance and the little R. You see, when we sin after we're a believer, we don't lose our salvation. So when we repent time and time again, when we confess our sins time and time again, it's not to regain our salvation. No, no, no. Jesus says this once and once for all. What's going on there is we're admitting our sins. It's relational. It's doing business with our Heavenly Father and knowing that He will forgive us time and time again. It's doing business with Him even though we are fully saved by Him. At home, a child is always the child of their parents. But when they do something wrong, they come and say, "Sorry." And the parents, being good parents, will forgive their children. How many times? Over and over and over again. But each time that child does something wrong in the home, it doesn't kick them out of the home. What happens is, though they are still part of the family, they come and deal with the problems. And I think that's what the little r-repentance and confession are. We confess our sins, we repent of them, we turn away from them. And we receive the forgiveness over and over and over again. So we've got the big repentance and the small day-to-day repentance. Sometimes in repentance in a person's life, there is radical change. Perhaps a person who first turns to Jesus in that big r-repentance, is coming from a life of chaos, drugs, alcohol, sexual sin, big things. And when they become a Christian, there's this huge change, immediate change sometimes. But for other people, the change is more gradual. There's more holding onto the things that we think are important, but are actually against God's will. And we hold on tightly to them. There's a slow change. It was more like my life. On the outside, I was pretty clean-skinned, really. But on the inside, sins in my life were harder to let go on. They had taken hold. They might have been less obvious, but they were equally more damaging in people's lives. But the change was equally remarkable as they have changed, as God has changed me in my life. But what I want to say is to be truly forgiven there cannot be zero change. When you are forgiven, you are changed no matter how long it takes. We do become more like Jesus and less like the world, when we have repented of our sins, when there's true repentance. Okay, so first thing we need to know when we need forgiveness from God is, we appeal to His character, His love. The second thing is, we need true humility, genuine humility, and the third is we need repentance. Finally, something I want to talk about, forgiveness and consequences. You see, we might come and want forgiveness because we're afraid of the consequences. But in this fourth section, I just want to remind us that though God often spares us of many of the consequences we deserve, it doesn't mean we're going to have zero consequences. We think about King David. He has committed adultery. He's murdered. He seeks forgiveness. It comes genuine. Zero sin is counted and held onto by God. However, King David has to face the consequences of his

actions. In 2 Samuel chapter 12, we see the consequences. He is told, "The sword will never depart from your house." Verse 10. Again, the consequences, you did it in secret, but the consequences will be in broad daylight. That's verse 12. And then seriously and hugely horribly, the consequences of his sin is though he did not die, the son that was born to him does. That's the consequences of his sin, the punishment, is that Bathsheba's son dies. David might come for forgiveness, but he cannot escape the consequences of his sin. It's the same with us. We might like to be forgiven so that that will erase the consequences, but it can't. It won't. Once evil has been done, it's possible we might face the full fury of the Lord or the church or our own family or our close relationships. I'm more worried about what people think about you than what God thinks about you. It might be that you refuse to repent because you don't want to face the consequences. You want to keep it hiding. You want to try and keep it in secret, covering up, covering up. And right now, today in our world, in the church, across the world, it just seems like there's ministers all over the place. They're being accused of terrible sins, sexual infidelity, false prophecies, greed, deception, manipulation, power and abuse. And some of those ministers, rather than coming out, coming clean, facing the consequences, they're covering up their tracks, refusing to take responsibility, hiding it so that they won't face the consequences of their actions. And if this is you today, you're listening in today, and you're hiding some things that you have done wrong, refusing to come out and repent of them in humility. What you're actually doing is making it worse for those that you've wronged, because they can't forgive you. You're refusing to seek forgiveness. You're making it so hard for them, but you're also making it really hard for yourself, because you're in this cycle, you're trapped in this cycle of denial and cover up, and it's just exhausting. But if you take action, even today, you seek repentance, firstly from God, and then maybe from the people that you have harmed. Seek forgiveness from God and from the people. Well, I can guarantee you what God will do, He will forgive the genuine, those who turn in faith to Him for forgiveness. He'll forgive. I don't know about the people that you've harmed. You might need to brace yourself for the consequences of your actions, but that is the right and godly way. So, we're talking about being forgiven. We appeal to God's love. We come in true humility. We repent, and sometimes we face the consequences. And I want to finish this sermon with the three R's. Those three R's are like three people in the room this morning. I wonder if one of these is you. The first R is to remember. We need to remember the love of God. You might be doubting that you're worthy of forgiveness. You might be doubting that God can actually forgive you. Like, maybe you're thinking, "I don't deserve it." And God is holding onto my sins and He's keeping them as a count towards me. And you might have forgotten that Jesus came to take that count away. The consequences of those sins, the eternal consequences, Jesus has taken. And maybe you're thinking those sins are still held against you before God. Let me remind you of Psalm 103 verse 12, which says this, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our sins from us. There are no eternal consequences for your sins for those who have been forgiven." We need to remember that. Micah 7:18. Who is God? Is there any God like you, God, who pardons sins and forgives the transgressions? Verse 19, "You have hurled all our sins into the depths of the ocean." That's what's happening in Christ Jesus. We might need to remember just how forgiven we truly are. Yes, keep bringing your day-to-day sins before the one who hurls them into the sins because he holds no condemnation on those who believe in Jesus. Remember that. Secondly, there's someone here that just might have forgotten the joy and we need to restore the joy of your salvation. That's what David cries out, "Restore unto me the joy of your salvation." I want to speak to you if you have no joy this morning. Today, you're filled with many griefs and anxieties, but no joy. There's Psalm 51, it's for you. David cries out, "Remind me, Heavenly

Father, remind me of the joy it is to be alive in you." I wonder if you need to be reminded of the joy of your salvation because I think it's really easy to forget. Our world is going nuts. But follower of Jesus, something certain is guaranteed. Your forgiveness is leading to eternal life and that cannot be taken away and when everything else is said and done, you will be welcomed into the arms of the Lord, not cast away. There is actually nothing greater in this world than knowing that the Lord will not cast your way. There's joy there. Perhaps you need to be reminded of that this morning. Heaven is singing his praises because he is a merciful and forgiving God. Great joy. And here's the third R. I'm speaking now to the person here, maybe listening online or listening in the sermon at church. To the person not sure, searching, wondering if Jesus is the one you should follow. I want to ask you this. What have you done business with God ever? Have you come to him? Have you come to him asking for real forgiveness? Have you come to him? Here's the R. Have you received his forgiveness? Do you know his love? Have you got the humility to come to him, stripped of all your pride? Are you ready to repent, to turn from your way of rejecting him? If you've not done this before, you might even be a churchgoer. Every week, sitting in the pews. But if you've not actually done that, you're not a Christian. You're not saved. And right now, your situation is distressing. Because right now, you're set on a path where you will be cast away from the Lord, forever. It has eternal consequences. But you know what? You can actually pray a prayer. And it's in our Psalm, verse 11, David cries out. He says, "Do not cast me away from your presence, God. I don't want to be cast away." And in Jesus Christ, all who believe in Jesus, all of them who have received that forgiveness will never be cast away. I'm wondering if that's your desire right now. If your desire is not to be cast away from the Lord, if you would be with him, to be drawn close rather than be kicked away. I just want to give you the chance now to receive it. To receive the forgiveness that's there for you. Yes, even you, with all of the sin, with all of the rebellion that you have done against God. Come to him, humble, bow your head. Repent of the things you've done wrong. Turn away from them. And receive his forgiveness. And if this is you and I don't even know you, perhaps you're looking online here and I don't even know who you are, leave a comment. I'll reach out to you. Leave an email address. I'll reach out to you. Don't leave it, but receive his forgiveness today. Be changed and transformed. It's the best thing you can do. [Music]