Penitential Psalms

Bible Survey 3

What are Penitential Psalms?

- Certain psalms are designated *Lament Psalms*.
- They are psalms where the psalmist sorrows over a calamity.
- In certain Lament Psalms, the psalmist sorrows over his own sin.
- These are the *Penitential Psalms*.
- Traditionally these cover Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143

The Catholic Church

- The Catholic Church designated Lent, as a time to fast and pray for sins.
- It was 40 day period preparing for Easter.
- It was an imitation of Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness.
- There were dietary restrictions.
- Often penance was prescribed for sin.
- As is true for many Catholic practices, it is a works-based, man-made tradition.

The Christian Church

- The Christian Church attaches no special significance to Lent.
- Yet the Penitential Psalms are a great resource to deal with the inevitable issue of sin in our daily walk.

The Believer's Walk

- A true believer does not *practice a habit of sin.*
- However, a true believer sooner or later stumbles into sin.
- We have His assurance of forgiveness for our sin.
- 1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

The Believer's Walk

- God is pleased with the humble believer who comes to Him and confesses his own sin.
- Is 55:7 *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.*
- When we sin, we can prayerfully read a penitential psalm to confess our sin.

Psalm 6

- This psalm is traditionally considered a penitential psalm … but it is not clear in the psalm that David is repenting sin.
- However David turns to the Lord for help.
- He describes his physical suffering where his bones are dismayed.
- And his spiritual suffering where his soul is dismayed.
- And his sighing and his tears.

Psalm 6

- The psalm ends with David's confidence in the Lord.
- He is confident the Lord has heard him.
- He is confident the Lord will deliver him from his enemies.
- Previously, David's bones and his soul were dismayed.
- David is now confident that instead of his being dismayed, it is his enemies who will be dismayed!

Psalm 32

- 1-2: Starts off by praising God for the blessing of forgiveness!
- 3-5: Then tells the story of the psalmist's guilt and confession
- 6-7: Then he describes the blessing of forgiveness
- 8-11: It then switches to God speaking. God promises to teach us and guide us if we are willing.

Psalm 51

- One of the most well known Penitential Psalms, on David's confession of his sin with Bathsheba.
- David had committed Adultery with Bathsheba.
- David had committed Murder of Uriah.
- Due to David's sin, Bathsheba had also committed Adultery.
- Due to David's sin, Joab had also committed Murder.
- Thus, David's sin resulted in others also sinning.

Psalm 51

- Sin often has many unintended consequences.
- It corrupts the sinner, and others whom he compromises.
- It tarnishes the reputation of God's people, and hence the reputation of God.
- It causes the enemies of God to rejoice.
- It pains the Heart of God.

Psalm 51

- David’s sin was terrible in its far reaching impact.
- It was a sin against God, but also against others whom he caused to sin.
- It was a sin against Bathsheba who was seduced.
- It was a sin against Joab who committed murder.
- It was a sin against Uriah who was betrayed, and then murdered.

Psalm 51

- Why then does David say in Ps 51:4 *Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight?*
- While David's sin impacted other sinners, his greatest sin was against God!
- When we sin, the one most sinned against is God!
- We should first confess to Him, and then set things right with others whom we have offended.

Psalm 51

- Another important lesson is Ps 51:5 *Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.*
- We are born with a handicap, a sin nature. We want to sin from our very birth.
- We too, like David, are burdened with a sin nature.
- But unlike David, we have a great advantage!

Psalm 51

- Eph 4:24 *and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth*.
- Unlike David, we have within us a New Nature, created in the Likeness of God!
- We have a New Nature that wants to please God!
- A New Nature that wants to resist sin!

Psalm 51

- When we finally go into the presence of the Lord, we will shed this body with all its sickness and ailments.
- We will shed the sin nature with its propensity to sin.
- We will be provided with a new perfect body with no sickness and no ailments.
- We will only have our new nature made for righteousness and truth.

Psalm 51

- Today, we only have our one weak body.
- But we do have our two natures, the sin nature, and the righteous nature.
- They struggle against each other.
- Today, we can resist sin *By the Spirit!*
- Eph 4:24 *for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live*.

Psalm 51

- In Ps 51:10 David cried to the Lord for a clean heart!
- We should struggle hard against temptation to sin.
- If we fall, we should quickly confess to the Lord.
- Like David, we should long for a clean heart.
- In 1 John 1:9 we are assured that God will hear us, and forgive us our sin.
- One day we will be rid of this body, and also this sin nature, and be righteous and perfect in His Presence!

Psalm 130

- The psalmist cries out to God.
- Vs 4: *But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.*
- He is confident that the Lord will forgive him.
- Vs 7: *O Israel, hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is lovingkindness, and with Him is abundant redemption.*
- He is confident that the Lord will redeem him.

Psalm 130

- Like the psalmist, we must sorrow over our sin.
- Like the psalmist, we must remind ourselves of the lovingkindness of the Lord and his promise to forgive our sin.
- Like the psalmist, we must confess our sin.
- Like the psalmist, we must rest in our sure confidence that He has forgiven our sin, and cleansed us from all unrighteousness.

Summary

- Penitential psalms are laments about personal sin.
- The psalmist cries out to God to forgive his sin.
- The psalmist is then confident, and rests in that the Lord has forgiven and redeemed him.
- This is a pattern for us to follow also.
- We can read a Penitential Psalm as a prayer when we do fall into sin.