

Midweek Lent
April 2, 2025
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Removing Our Guilt

Psalm 51:8-9 (EHV)

Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones you have crushed celebrate.

⁹Hide your face from my sins. Erase all my guilty deeds.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Lent is a heavy season of the Church Year. The readings focus on sin, rebellion, and guilt. It is difficult to miss the penitential theme of Lent with the purple paraments and the continual focus on our personal sin. We've certainly had that in the first part of Psalm 51. David has gone into great detail about sin and confession. We've become convinced that our sins are against the Holy Lord God. God has revealed that we were conceived and born with a sinful nature, that we started life in rebellion against our God. God's perfect demands have been laid upon us and we have not met these righteous demands of the law. We need to repent. We need to repent. We need to repent is the repeated refrain during Lent.

Oh, how we are looking forward to Easter! The alleluia's will be sung again and sung loudly on that day. We want to rejoice in the forgiveness of sins, the removal of guilt. We want to have joy and gladness in the resurrection of Christ and the hope of eternal life that his resurrection guarantees. A thousand years before Jesus died on a Friday and rose on Sunday, David was ready for some joy and gladness too. He writes in verses 8-9 of Psalm 51:

Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones you have crushed celebrate.

⁹Hide your face from my sins. Erase all my guilty deeds.

David's bones were feeling the weight of his sins and rebellious acts. God had used the law brought to David through the prophet Nathan to crush David's bones. Not literally crushed but David was feeling like he couldn't do anything. God's law has done that for us too. A person without bones is not able to do anything, move anywhere, has no power. Our sinfulness has rendered us powerless before God too. We are dead in sins and trespasses. We have no ability to do anything good to make up for our sins. We cannot do anything to wipe our sins away.

We may try to erase our sins because we can make it look like we have not sinned. We can fool other people. It is like someone who takes a piece of chocolate cake with chocolate frosting that did not belong to them. This cake burglar quickly eats the cake getting frosting on his lips and crumbs in his lap. But a quick shake of the shirt while standing up removes the crumbs to the floor. A good wipe of the face removes the chocolate from his lips. Of course, I'm only explaining what could be done to hide the eating of a forbidden piece of cake, not that I know from personal experience. Wipe away the evidence and no one knows who thieved the cake. Nothing remains...except the calories and the guilt. For you know what you've done.

So it is with every sin. We can sometimes wipe away the visible evidence, but the guilt remains. We know what we've thought. We know what we've said, and we know what we've done. So does our God in heaven. David knew he could not erase his guilt. He could not hide his sins. Only God could truly erase guilt. Therefore, David pleads with the Lord,

Erase all my guilty deeds.

The idea behind the words "guilty deeds" includes the sins and the punishment deserved for the sins and the knowledge that we deserve punishment for sins. The last idea is usually what we mean when we talk about guilt. We've done something wrong, and we feel guilty because we know we've done something against our God. David is confident in this Psalm that the Lord has

the ability to erase guilt. How does God do this?

Does he use his almighty power to go into our minds and delete the memory of what we've done so we no longer feel guilty? No. Does God tell us to empty our minds by repeating phrases over and over again so that we drive out the guilty feelings? No, that is eastern meditation religions that give such false hopes. Does God tell us to cover up our guilt with good deeds so that our guilty deeds look small in comparison? No. David makes this bold request to the Lord to erase, to wipe away, his guilt.

In order to erase the accurate feeling that we deserve punishment from God for our guilty deeds, our Lord deals with the punishment that is earned by those guilty deeds. The Lord doesn't try to make us believe something that isn't based in reality. In other words, he does not just tell us to believe that we are not guilty, that everything is fine, when our conscience is screaming at us that everything is not fine and that we are guilty. That would be like me telling you to believe that the paraments in church today are green. Just make yourself believe that the altar and pulpit and lectern are draped with green cloths. You might be able to make yourself say that the paraments are green, but you would not truly believe it because the reality is that they are purple.

God deals with the reality of our guilty deeds and the punishment our sin deserves so that we can believe the truth that we are no longer guilty before the Lord. David would have been very familiar with the pictures God gave his people in the Old Testament for how God removes guilt. God does so by substitution. When David became king of all Israel, he had the Ark of the Covenant brought to Jerusalem and pitched a tent for it. At this place, once a year, two vivid pictures of God removing guilt would take place on the same day.

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would sacrifice one goat to atone for the sin of the people. The blood of the goat was to be sprinkled on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant, covering the sins of the people against God's holy law. The guilt of the people was covered by the blood of a substitute. The priest would also take a live goat and confess upon it all the sins of the people. Then this scapegoat would be sent into the wilderness to carry away the guilt of the people. These vivid pictures showed the people how God erases and sends away guilt – with a substitute who bears the guilt of the people.

Those pictures along with the rest of the ceremonial/worship practices given through Moses pointed to Christ Jesus. He is the perfect substitute who has no sin but took ours upon himself.

God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree. (1 Peter 2:24).

We all have gone astray like sheep. Each of us has turned to his own way, but the Lord has charged all our guilt to him. (Isaiah 53:6)

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world. (1 John 2:2)

The holy, precious blood of Christ has atoned for, wiped away, erased the guilt of the whole world. He willingly sacrificed himself upon the cross to carry our sins away and be the substitutionary guilt offering for all people. These are the facts. This is the reality of what happened on Good Friday. Jesus finished the payment for sin. Because of Christ's vicarious (a fancy word for substitute) atonement, God has hidden his face from our sins. He sees the life of his perfect Son, and the payment for every sin by his perfect Son instead of our sins.

David writes: *Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones you have crushed celebrate.*

Joy and gladness and celebration happen when we are brought to believe the facts. Jesus is the substitute for the guilt of every person. Those who do not know this fact and those who choose to

reject this fact obviously don't rejoice and celebrate in the vicarious atonement of Christ. There may be hours or days or weeks when we who believe don't completely trust that Jesus has erased all our guilt. We still feel guilty. We still think we have to do something to remove our guilt completely. When these feelings of guilt remain in you, repent and look at to the cross of Christ. Compare your feelings with the facts and align your feelings with the facts. Jesus died for you. Christ shed his blood to atone for all of your sins. Christ carried your guilt away as far as the east is from the west. These are the facts and Christ's own resurrection from the dead on Easter Sunday proved it all.

David had confidence that God would send a Savior to provide full payment for his guilt to erase it all. We rejoice and are glad that we can look back and see the facts of how Christ removed our guilt. Therefore, we can pray to our Lord confidently as David taught us:

Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones you have crushed celebrate.

⁹Hide your face from my sins. Erase all my guilty deeds.

Amen.