

# THE FIFTY-FIRST PSALM

## A SERMON

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“Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, you God of my salvation; and my tongue shall sing aloud of your righteousness.” Psalm 51:14

PHARISAIC is the use which has been made by many theologians of this Psalm, and that on the ground of their assuming that this Psalm was written by David after his fall recorded in the book of Samuel. Because there is a writing, which, of course, is uninspired, over the Psalm that asserts the same, many infer that it was so. And so this Psalm in the vocabulary of the Pharisee is called the Penitential Psalm, and of course belongs to none but here and there a notorious, out-of-the-way sinner, that has done something very similar to the crimes of David, and that the Psalm may belong to such a notorious sinner as that, but that it does not belong to Christians, in general. And so they pique themselves as being something very much better than David, and that it is quite unnecessary for them to use the humble and the earnest language of this Psalm. When I first met with that pharisaic use made of this Psalm, my attention was led the more particularly to ask on what ground it was so confidently asserted that David wrote the Psalm at all, and especially that he wrote it after his fall. And four things weighed with me to make me call in question whether David did write this Psalm at all or not, and especially on the occasion referred to. Of course it would be absurd for me to say that he did not, for I cannot, of course, prove the negative; nor do I say that David, did not write the Psalm, nor that he did not write it under the circumstances referred to; I cannot say this. But I have very strong doubts about the question, and there are four considerations that make me lean quite another way. The first is, that there is no positive proof whatever in the Psalm that David wrote it on that occasion; there is no positive proof. That is one reason; and we ought not to assert things with a confidence beyond the authority we have for that confidence. And the next reason that makes me doubt is, that, however adapted some of the language of this Psalm might appear, and especially that of our text, to the circumstance under which it is supposed to be written, there is another circumstance to which the language is much more adapted: for, in going through this Psalm, I find that Zion had been dealt violently with; I find that the walls of Jerusalem had been thrown down; I find that the priesthood had been, as regards its service, put an end to; and were I disposed to think that there is any one circumstance to which this Psalm refers, I should say it refers to the return of the Jews from captivity. And I am

more inclined to think that Joshua, the high priest we read of in the 3rd of Zechariah, rather was the author, under the circumstances in which he was placed, than that David was. Hence he prays that the Lord would do good unto Zion, and that he would build the walls of Jerusalem; and then that the Lord should be pleased with sacrifices of righteousness, that they should offer burnt offerings and bullocks upon his altar. Here, then, if Joshua stood forth as the representative of the people, how adapted the language is unto that circumstance and unto that time. When I look, then, at the exact adaptation of the language to the return of the Jews from the captivity, this would rather be my inference than that David was the author of that Psalm. But then it may be said, What has that to do with blood guiltiness, and with the other parts of the Psalm? Why, these priests, the priesthood had been first in forsaking God's covenant, in digging down God's altars, and in slaying God's prophets; and here, then, supposing Joshua, we may as well assume one thing as another, was the author of this Psalm, he prays to be delivered from that blood guiltiness which his predecessors had practiced and he prays for the joy of God's salvation to be restored; he prays, in a word, for all that seems to make the Psalm very applicable to the return of the Jews from the captivity. But, in fact, while it may apply to this circumstance, it is intended as a Psalm for all the people of God. Then the third thing that makes me call in question whether David wrote this Psalm is, that the language of this Psalm is especially Levitical. David's language generally is not so strongly Levitical as is the language of this Psalm. Hence, the priests were to be washed at the door of the tabernacle; and in allusion to priestly ceremonies, it says, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." And in allusion to the cleansing of the leper, which was the business of the priest, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." And then, again, "renew within me a right spirit. Then will I teach transgressors your ways; and sinners shall be converted unto you." Here, then, is language strongly Levitical, expressive of the washings of the tabernacle; and it was especially the business of the priests to teach the people. When I look at the fact, then, that there is no positive proof that David wrote the Psalm; secondly, when I look at its adaptation to the return of the Jews from captivity; third, when I look at another fact, namely, that the language is strongly Levitical, I am still strengthened in my doubts as to whether David wrote this Psalm or not. And I should like to prove, if I could, that it was written by some other, in order to repel that Pharisaic spirit and Pharisaic use that is made of this Psalm. And then the fourth thing, before I enter upon the subject, that has made me doubt, is this: it does not appear to me to be a very probable thing that David would compose a psalm to commemorate a circumstance which he would wish as soon as he could to forget. It is quite uncustomary in the Scriptures to do so. I am fully aware it is very customary in the world, and especially in the professing world, to reap up old grievances, and it is very difficult to get people to drop them. But then this custom of the world and this custom of professors is not the custom of the Bible. David's faults are mentioned historically, but they are never mentioned reflectively; nor are any of the faults of the Old Testament saints ever mentioned reflectively. They are mentioned historically, as forming a part of the circumstances through which they came; but they are never named reflectively. And hence the New Testament, from the first chapter of Matthew to the last of the Revelation, makes not the least allusion throughout to any one of the faults of the Old Testament saints. The Lord had dropped the subject. He says, "I, even I, am he that blot out your transgressions, and will not remember your sins." Nor does he; he does not suffer one of the faults of the Old Testament saints to be recorded in the New Testament. And Peter himself, his fault in denying the Lord is named historically in all four of the Gospels, but it is never named after that; it is never named reflectively. And Peter writes two epistles, but he does not refer to his fault in either of those epistles. He knew there was enough said about that, and he himself wished to forget

it; and so, instead of referring to his fault in his epistles, he says, "We were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard when we were with him in the holy mount." Here, you observe, Peter makes no reference to his fault. Nor do I think much of those books where men have paraded their faults before men and put them into print. It does not appear to me to be the spirit of true humility, not the spirit of the Bible. I therefore think it a very improbable thing that David should compose a Psalm to commemorate that God had blotted out, that God had forgiven, that God had forgotten, and that David wished to forget, and to go on in the triumphs of the grace of God. Now our text, perhaps, may seem rather strong against me, but we shall presently see how it applies to every person under heaven. These, then, are my four reasons that make me call in question whether David wrote this Psalm, at least, under the circumstances that are generally thought: first, that there is no positive proof; and second, that, adapted as the language may seem to be, it is better adapted to the return of the Jews from captivity; and third, that the language is Levitical, that is, not used in any one other amidst the 150 Psalms that we have, such language is not used in any Psalm besides. When I look, therefore, at the absence of proof, when I look to the adaptation of the language to the return of the Jew's from the captivity, when I look at the language being Levitical, and, fourth, when I look at the improbability of David composing a Psalm to commemorate what God had forgiven and forgotten, and David wished to pass away from, in the sweet remembrance of God's mercy; these things make me call in question whether the Psalm was ever intended to be expressive of any one circumstance at all, but that, like the rest of the Psalms, it is intended for the general use of the church of God, and is intended to set forth the work of the Holy Spirit in all ages, and in all parts of the family of God.

Now, having made these few remarks, I will enter upon the subject without enlarging further on this matter. I am aware, of course, of the objections to these observations I have made, but those objections I will not notice. I will now go on to notice salvation, and the consequence there of. "Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, you God of my salvation; and my tongue shall sing aloud of your righteousness."

First, then, *the salvation that is here sought*. "Deliver me from blood guiltiness." Now, what is the blood guiltiness here? We must refer to the word of God, and see if we can get an explanation, and we shall get an explanation. In the first place, we are assured that anger in the heart is murder; even that is blood guiltiness. And we are also assured that the carnal mind is enmity against God. Now all men, by nature being in a state of ignorance of the majesty of God's law, are naturally, though they know it not, at enmity with that law. And all men by nature being ignorant of the new covenant, being ignorant of the way in which God's law is fulfilled, being ignorant of the way in which sin is put away, being ignorant of the way in which God, from first to last, saves a sinner; men being ignorant of it, they are at enmity against it. And therefore, it is that there is not a man nor a woman under the sun, there never was, and there never will be, that has not tacitly consented to the deed of them that crucified the Lord Jesus Christ. "Are we" says the apostle, "better than they? No; in no way." So, the blood guiltiness here is expressive of our state by nature, of enmity against God's blessed truth. Hence it was that Cain was of this same spirit and killed his brother. And Cain was no worse in his nature than the rest of us. So that the sum and substance of it all is simply this: Here am I, as though the Psalmist should say, here am I, a poor sinner, and by nature an enemy to God, by nature an enemy to his holiness, an enemy to his righteousness, an enemy to

his truth, an enemy to his dear Son; so that I have, as a sinner considered, consented unto the deed and counsel of them that crucified the Lord Jesus Christ. And here is a prayer to be delivered from that state. Hence you will find how very solemnly the Apostle Paul reasons upon this very subject with the Corinthians, when the Corinthians turned the ordinance of God not only into a meal; that was degrading the ordinance to turn it into a meal; it was not intended as a meal, but simply as an ordinance, simply as a means of commemorating and setting forth the death of Jesus Christ. But the Corinthians not only turned the ordinance into a meal, but they turned it into a bacchanalian feast; and hence, says the apostle, "One eats, another is drunken." And they thus treated the Son of God as though no reverence was due to him; they thus treated the blood of the everlasting covenant as though it was a common thing. And the apostle reasons very solemnly upon that, and he says, "He that shall eat of this bread and drink of this cup unworthily," that is, in that unworthy manner, "shall be guilty of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ." "He that eats," the apostle repeats it a little further on, "of this bread and drinks of this cup unworthily, eats and drinks damnation unto himself." So that you see here that all enmity against God's way of salvation is reckoned murder, is reckoned treading underfoot the Son of God, is reckoned counting the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and is reckoned doing despite unto the spirit of his grace. Now, when a sinner is convinced of his state, and feels he is guilty, he feels there is not a commandment, from the first to the last, in the law that he is not guilty of. I do not mean externally and practically, God forbid! for then we should have hell upon the earth if that were the case, but my meaning is that when a sinner is convinced, as Saul of Tarsus was, that in his flesh dwelt no good thing; that when he was convinced, although it is true he had been guilty literally and practically of blood guiltiness; but all of us by nature are at enmity against God. So that when convinced of our state, our prayer is for pardon. Every man that is taught of God sees sin to be a great evil; he sees it to be that which the blood of Christ alone can deliver him from. Every man that is taught of God sees himself to be a great, a lost, and feels himself to be a helpless sinner, and that nothing but the blood of Jesus Christ can deliver him. Every one taught of God sees that there is no name too bad for sin; he sees that sin has benighted the soul, that sin slew the Savior, and that sin would slay the Almighty himself if it possibly could. Now when a sinner's eyes are thus opened, he prays to be delivered from the guilt of this. He sees his guilt is great; that man sees that he is in his nature everything that is bad; that he is an idolater, a murderer, an adulterer, a thief, and, in a word, everything that is bad; he sees this, and he feels that his heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. When the sinner's eyes are thus opened, he sees there is a law to be met that he can do nothing towards meeting; he sees that justice has demands that the sinner cannot, in whole or in part, answer; he sees that holiness has honors that the sinner cannot approach. Here is the sinner carnal, sold under sin; down he sinks in his own eyes, and he is brought then into solemn soul-trouble.

We may look, then, upon the promises of God in all our troubles; because, if the Lord has saved us, if he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? So that, being made acquainted with the salvation of Christ, we may look, I say, upon his promises under the vast variety of necessities and circumstances in which we may be placed. What malady can you think of, what trouble can you think of, that there is not a promise that is suited to us? If you know not which way to go, nor what will become of you, there stands the declaration, "The Lord will provide." And if you are saying, "I shall fall someday by the hand of Saul then there is the declaration that "he will not suffer your foot to be moved; he that keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." And if you fear that you shall be lost, and fear that you are

deceiving yourself, there stands the declaration that “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” And if the evils of nature so abound, and you feel more than usual compassed about with infirmities, and increasingly think what a poor creature you are, there stands the declaration, that “where sin abounded, grace does much more abound.” If you think your sins are worse than anyone else’s, and are ready to think that you are more deeply steeped in your nature in sin than another, there stands the kind invitation, “Come, let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though red like crimson, they shall be as wool;” and you will begin to see that you must put the Lord Jesus Christ above all your sins. Satan will sometimes come in, and try to discourage you, on the ground of what you feel as a poor sinner; but then we should dishonor, we should actually dishonor the Lord Jesus Christ if we were to believe that sin had more power to destroy than he has to save. It has cheered my heart times out of number when I have been enabled to remember this one thing, that there is not anything too hard for the salvation of Christ, that there is not anything too hard for the salvation of God. This made the apostle, upon this very ground, say, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believes.” And then, again, those who are thus brought to know the mercy of God in Christ, to understand what Christ has done, and to realize his salvation, it is said of such, “With joy shall they draw water out of the wells of salvation;” which is nothing else but those consolations and supports to which I have referred, the exceeding great and precious promises of God. So that if God should so love us as to give us this great Savior, what will he not do? If Jesus so loved us as to lay down a life of infinite and eternal value for our eternal salvation, what will he not do? And if the Lord met with us while we were yet sinners, and opened our blind eyes, and blessed us with the spirit of grace and of supplication, and led us to seek His face, if he loved us then, will he hate us now? if he received us then, will he reject us now? If he showed mercy to us then, much more now, being reconciled by the death of his Son, shall we be saved from wrath through him; and if the Lord remembered us in our low estate, when we were enemies, and afar off by wicked works, will he forget us now? Oh no, my hearer. To be brought, then, out of enmity into this reconciliation, to be brought to see the great salvation that Jesus Christ has wrought, is to see all the promises of God on our side, and to see the Lord on our side by those promises. And when the Lord is pleased to reveal this salvation in its glory, it presents the Lord God Almighty in such a lovely light, in such an endearing light, in such an attractive light, that there is no language too strong to express what has been, even on this side of the grave, realized by some of the saved in times gone by. Hence God has been to one his “exceeding joy;” and another has said, “All my springs are in you;” and another has said, “I will greatly rejoice in your salvation;” another has said, “Lord, now let you your servant depart in peace; my eyes have seen your salvation.” Ah, then, happy the man that sees and feels what a poor wretch he is, and, saying with the apostle, “Oh, wretched man that I am,” is led to appreciate the dear Savior in fulfilling the law, in atoning for sin, in putting sin away, and sealing the promises of the everlasting covenant, and bringing us into such reconciliation to God, and into such a state of acquaintance with God, as to stand on the ground indicated by the apostle when he said, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?”

Now then, when the soul is thus delivered from its guilt, from the law and its curse, and brought into the knowledge of God’s salvation, and to see that all the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ Jesus, then comes the latter part of our text, “And my tongue shall sing aloud of your righteousness.” There is a fivefold righteousness, or the term righteousness may be understood in a fivefold respect, and in all these respects the saved soul shall sing of God’s righteousness. The

first is, God's right to do as he pleases. God can love whom he pleases. And whatever objection men may have against this doctrine of God loving whom he pleases. I can tell you one thing, as far as my own soul is concerned, I know if the Lord could not love just whom he pleased, he never could love me. I feel sure of that. I feel sure I am that poor, sinful creature, lost, helpless, and ruined, that if the Lord had not loved me by virtue of his own right, and because he was pleased to do so, I am sure he never could have loved me at all. And I am sure, if you are taught of God, this is what you will be led to. And you will sing, therefore, of his right to love whom he pleases. And if he has been pleased to love you, let others quarrel with his sovereignty, you have reason to rejoice in it, and bless the Lord that, in the exercise of his sovereign right, he has been pleased to love you. And surely, if you are brought to know what you are as a sinner, and to receive the testimony of what Christ has done, this is nothing else but the love of God to you, and therefore you love him because he has loved you. And so, I will sing aloud of your right to love as you please. And so, also, his right to choose; this is another part of the matter. And so the saints of God in different ages have sung of God's sovereignty in choosing Jacob; they have given thanks that God had, from the beginning, chosen them to salvation; they have rejoiced that they were blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, according as they were chosen in him before the foundation of the world. Now then, if you are a saved soul, you will give to God this honor, you will sing of his sovereign right to do as he pleases. I really do not know anything clearer than this to the man who is led into the truth, God's right to do as he pleases. That is the best way to settle this matter, to come to your own experience and to the word of God, and ask yourself this question, that if the Lord does love me, why does he love me? Is it because of any good I have ever done? You would not like to say that, because that would contradict the Scripture's saying, "It is not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to his mercy has he saved us." And if you have a hope of interest in electing grace, and you receive that heavenly truth, then I am sure you may ask the question, Why was my name, supposing it is, inscribed in his eternal book? why was my name put there? Why, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight." And perhaps you will say, or at least another might say, Suppose I am not one of these that the Lord has loved and chosen? Well, then, you will never be concerned about it. Do you know what the language of election is? because I can tell you. The language of eternal election is, "Him that comes unto me I will in no way cast out." That is the language of election. It was the Chosen One that uttered those words, "Him that comes unto me, I will in no way cast out." So, if you are willing to come; if you see that nothing but grace could have inscribed your name in the book of life, and you have a willingness to come to that, to receive that, to walk in it, to abide in it, then, if you receive that, that is a proof that he has received you. But if you live and die an enemy to electing grace, an enemy to God's sovereignty, then I must leave you; I cannot say what your destiny may be; it is a bad sign; it is a black mark against you. God will have all the saved come to his own terms. And so, you will not only come to God's own terms, but you will rejoice in God's right to do as he pleases in the exercise of that right.

Then the second sense in which such an one will sing of God's righteousness is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And what is the language of the righteousness of Jesus Christ? Why, Him that comes unto me, I will in no way cast out." What a sweet aspect of the gospel is this! Well now, come, some of you little ones, you must know whether you are poor enough to need electing grace, and whether you are brought to understand this, and to receive it. If so, there it is, you shall not be cast out. Just so the mediatorial work of Christ. Indeed, when the Savior uttered those words, "Him that comes unto me, I will in no way cast out," that's the language of every doctrine

of salvation; that's the language of every department, because all these are embodied in him. And so, the language of his righteousness is, "Him that comes unto me, I will in no way cast out." If you know that all your righteousness is as filthy rags, and that your hope is in what Christ has done, your hope is in his righteousness, then you will not be cast out. May the Lord help you, some of you that are from time to time tried with doubts and fears upon this matter; If electing grace be made clear to you, that you are poor enough to need it, are brought to it, and desire to rejoice in it, you will never be cast out from that. And if you are poor enough to need the work of Jesus Christ, his righteousness as the way of justification, the same language which is there, "Him that comes unto me, I will in no way cast out." I will sing aloud of your right to do as you please. I will sing aloud of your righteousness by your dear Son. The third sense in which the word righteousness must be understood is that of the service of faith. And here the word righteousness almost resolves itself into the idea of faithfulness. Do you walk in the ways of the Lord, and practically sympathize with his cause and with the poor? You people in trade, when you get a few extra pounds, do you go to your minister, or do you go to the deacons, and say, "Well now, the Lord has blessed me with a few extra pounds in trade; I dare say you know some very poor and needy Christians; aged, afflicted, needy Christians? Do you come to the minister, or to the deacons, and say, Well now, here are a few pounds extra, I will give a tithe to the Lord in gratitude for them? Do you do that? I know some of you ought to, that do not; though, I will venture to say, the deacons would find worthy objects of your kindness. But, however, hundreds of you are very consistent in this matter; you subscribe very liberally and kindly to the poor. And some of you are as stingy as the devil; hardly know what to make of you. You are like snails, you live in your own shells; creep, creep, grapple, grapple, grapple, scrape all together you possibly can; and you must die and leave it all behind you, after all. Why, you would rather go half a mile round out of your way than meet a poor Christian and give him something, some of you. And yet you are not comfortable; you are always miserable. All the wealth in the world won't make you happy; it is peace in Christ that will make a man happy. Well, the apostle says of those that do practically sympathize with the cause of the Lord and with the poor, and while there are some exceptions, it will apply to many of you, "God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labor of love, which you have showed toward his name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister." So that they were not tired of remembering the poor; they were not weary in well-doing. And even a cup of cold water, when rightly given, shall not lose its reward. And here we will sing of God's faithfulness in remembering our poor services, our humble services; what a high estimation he puts upon them. "In keeping of his testimonies there is great reward." Let the saved man then show that he is saved from covetousness as well as from other things. And then, the fourth sense in which the Christian will sing of God's righteousness is the dealings of God. Everything will come right at last; that is, with those that are right in their faith and right in their hearts; with those that can settle the great question in the affirmative, "Is your heart right?" Now, with such all will come right at last. However, many crooked things there may be by the way, yet it will be proved at last that God has led you forth by a right way, that you may come to a city of habitation. The apostle presents these dealings of the Lord as coming right at last in a very beautiful form. "These light afflictions;" light in comparison of what we deserve; light in comparison of what we must have endured if we had been lost; light in comparison of what Christ endured for us; "light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." So, in this sense also, we shall sing of God's righteousness. And then there is the ascriptive righteousness; the glory that is to be rightfully ascribed to his name. In all these senses we are to sing of his righteousness. So that we are saved righteously as well as mercifully; and everything must come right at last.

But there is one little word in our text I may just notice before I close, and that is, the Psalmist says, "I will sing *aloud* of your righteousness." Now, it is a truth, and a delightful one too, that everything else is to be put to silence. The work of Christ puts sin to silence, and puts Satan to silence, puts death to silence, and puts tribulation to silence, and puts all adversaries to silence, and there shall be nothing heard but the salvation of God, nothing heard but the righteousness of God, nothing heard but the glory of God. Hence, we go on towards the close of the Bible, and see and watch the song there; there it is with a loud voice, ascribing salvation unto God and the Lamb. Those are sacred times when the Lord is pleased to silence our sins, and doubts, and fears, and troubles, and cause us to feel as though nothing was speaking to us but the love of God, as though nothing was speaking to us but the salvation of God, but the mercy of God, but the promises of God. And herein lies our peace, the Lord puts all adversaries to everlasting silence, and bringing us into his glorious presence; not having then, as we have now, such a mixture of things. What of worldly cares, what of bodily, and family, and other troubles, and what of infirmities, and weaknesses, and one thing and the other, it is really almost a wonder that we are kept seeking the Lord at all; it is almost a wonder that we ever get any of the dew of heaven at all; it seems almost a wonder we get hold of it at all; for how many things there are to stop us, how many things there are to hold us back; how many things there are to sever us from our God! But bless the Lord! many as they are, if he be on our side, then greater is he that is for us than all that can be against us.

May the Lord bless us, then, increasingly with the spirit of grace and supplication, and then with the spirit of liberty, that we may glorify him for the great things he has done for us.