

## **Psalm 6**

### **“A Contrite Heart”**

#### **Intro:**

The writing of Psalm 6 is attributed to King David, as we note in the text. And while we don't know for sure what the precipitating event was that gave David reason to write this Psalm, there are indications from the text that he was likely suffering some grave, physical illness or affliction and that he had attributed a sin of some measure as the reason for it. And we'll begin to notice a pattern emerge as we read through this Psalm where a penitent David cries out to the Lord to rescue him.

Now that brings us to our first fun fact: that Psalm 6 is the first of 7 Psalms commonly referred to as “Penitential Psalms” because they all reflect a heart of penitence. The language that's expressed in the following 10 verses of Psalm 6 is the language spoken from the lips of one who is **truly** penitent and brokenhearted over their sin. We will see David express THREE **sure** hallmarks of a broken and contrite heart:

#### **1. SORROW**

#### **2. HUMILIATION**

#### **3. THE HATRED OF ONE'S SIN.**

Those of us who are truly IN Christ on THIS side of the Cross can be assured that the inner witness of the Holy Spirit will cause us to grow in these 3 hallmarks of penitence. If we aren't growing in the sorrow OVER our sin, if we aren't growing in the humiliation IN our sin, and if we aren't growing in the hatred OF our sin, then we have good reason to be concerned whether we are even in Christ at all. He is **always** at work sanctifying His

kids. He doesn't sanctify those that *aren't* His children. Even earthly parents don't discipline children they don't know. So if you don't feel any particular sorrow, or humiliation, or hatred of your sin, then cry out to Him to build that in you. Because a growing **IN** repentance is one of the assurances that you are indeed saved. Many people today think of repentance like a vaccine but true repentance is a *pattern* of sorrow over sin, it's a *growing hatred* of the very thing that grieves the Holy Spirit, and a turning to Him for rest in His finished work upon the Cross that restores us to life in Him.

This Psalm, being one of the 7 so-called "Penitential Psalms" is therefore a lament over sin. Actually, it's sort of like the story of Job all wrapped up in a single Psalm: we'll see David complaining of bodily affliction, we'll see him describe a troubled heart coming from what he perceives as some sin he's committed, we'll see him beg for the mercy of God to restore him, we'll see David respond to the reproofs of his enemies, and finally we'll see where David assures himself of God's faithfulness and His expedient answer to David's prayer.

### **Verses 1 - 3:**

I think we can safely divide these 10 verses into 2 parts. The first 7 verses contain the language of David's various complaints before God.

And even just teaching on prayer can be a difficult thing because, from the pulpit, it might appear that one who teaches on the subject of prayer could sometimes appear in a way that they're not. That we could have a facade of greatness when in truth, it **IS** just

a facade. Prayer has always been an incredibly important part of my life. I've always seen myself as weak in prayer. I'm always reminded of one thing: there's only ONE HERO in this story: Jesus Christ. There are no great men; there are only weak men of a Great and Merciful God Who gives us Grace. My problem is that I have no idea of how truly weak I actually am. If I did, that weakness would drive me to more and more prayer. The older I get, and the longer I walk with the Lord, the more immature I realize that I am. And that should drive me to greater and greater prayer.

The **tone** of these first 7 verses suggests something **very** important: *contrition*. The final 3 verses David expresses great confidence that the Lord has heard his prayer and has delivered him from his affliction.

Starting here in Verses 1 & 2, David writes, "(1) *O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath. (2) Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled.*" David sensed that he must have been under some Divine chastisement and that he was somehow deserving of it (though the offense that merits it is not described to us here in the text). Yet David doesn't ask to be delivered out from underneath this chastisement. Indeed, he may have understood that this Divine rebuke would actually come as a blessing since God is Perfect and only does what is right according to His own wise counsel for His glory and for our benefit.

David didn't ask God to stay His hand; only that the Lord not rebuke him *in anger*. He's saying, "Lord it is a blessed thing when you remind me of my sin, but please don't

remind me as One whose fury burns against me”. “Punish me if you must, but don’t punish me from a place of wrath” (or as the KJV puts it “*hot displeasure*”), lest the rod that God strikes him with becomes more of a flaming sword than a corrective, loving instrument of Divine chastisement. God designs His chastening in order to humble us and to keep us close. So those of us in Christ can always take reassurance that even though no one can chastise like the Lord, that He does it only to those He loves and who belong to Him by way of His covenant with us through the Cross. And that’s great news to those of us who constantly fail, constantly stumble, constantly fall short.

Looking at that last sentence in Verse 2, “...*heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled*”, David attributes fear to his bones. Not because bones are imbued with feeling (which they certainly are). But rather because the magnitude of his grief was such that it affected his entire body. I mean, it’s sort of interesting that he doesn’t mention his flesh; that part of his composition that is the most tender, most susceptible to sensation and feeling. No, he mentions his bones. Bones are the terra-firma of the human body, the very architecturally sound, weight-bearing framework of our anatomical makeup. He’s saying that his grief and terror run so deep, it causes the strongest structures of his very *being* to tremble and quake. Why? An honest sense of his own sinful depravity will do that. It’s clear David had that sense.

But I think it’s in Verse 3 that we find the essence of David’s heart in his cries to God. David writes, “(3) *My soul also is greatly troubled...*”. It’s bad enough when physical affliction takes hold, but far worse are the troubles that crushes a soul. That grief is

intolerable. What agony indeed. And you can think of innumerable examples of soul-crushing pain and trouble. We probably don't need to belabor the many injuries that could cause it.

Continuing in verse 3, "...*But you, O Lord-- how long?*" David's affliction brought his sin to his own mind and he looked upon it as a just measure of God's displeasure with him; in large part, that was what troubled his soul. That's one of the things that caused him to cry. That David writes and asks of God, "...*O Lord-- how long?*" is to suggest that this has been a suffering that has lasted some time. And worse, David must have felt a sense of abandonment by God as evidenced by what he says in the next verse.

#### **Verse 4 - 5:**

From verse 4, "*Turn, O Lord, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love.*" "*Turn, O Lord...*" he's saying "Lord, turn and look upon me. Don't keep your back to me. Return O Lord". And it is THIS that I believe we see was the primary cause of trouble in David's soul: that he believed God was absent. That God had left him. And David knew that if God had indeed left him, that if He would just return to David, his misery would vanish. How many times in my own life was I certain that God had left me? Particularly early in my walk with the Lord as a troubled young Christian. Thankfully God was always faithful to preserve me. Because there are hardly words to describe the blackness of despair that a belief like that causes. Dear friends, never despair; let us always remember the promise of God that He will never leave us nor forsake us.

The plea that David makes in Verse 4 is really remarkable because it's a 3-fold prayer: "Return to me, deliver me, and save me". And it's remarkable because David petitions God to be Who He is, and to show Himself as still being what He had always been. When you cry out to the Lord, pray the promises of God! It's for your benefit to be reminded of Who He Is and what He has said He will do. It will cause you to abandon your tendency to judge who God is by your circumstances and instead, grow in judging your circumstances by Who God is!

#### **Verse 5:**

Now then, we can see clearly that David was in fear for his life - perhaps also for his eternal life. In verse 5 he writes, "*For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who will give you praise?*". David considers Sheol to be the common gathering place of the dead, a gloomy region where the dead reside. And therefore, since remembrance and praise of God were impossible in Sheol, David appeals to God that saving him would allow him to worship the Lord here and now, knowing that the Lord delights in the praises of His people.

Death puts an end to any opportunity or capacity to glorify God in this world, and ends our service to the interests of His kingdom by bringing souls on this earth to a saving knowledge of Christ. Now, some (like myself) maintain that the joys of the believer's existence in heaven are far more desirable than the comforts of the believers here on

earth. On the other hand though, the service of the Christians in heaven are not engaged in a continual waging of the war against sin, nor in edifying the body of Christ. Christians in the courts of God in heaven are indescribably happy, no doubt about it - but soldiers in the field are far more useful. Therefore we might, with very good reason, pray that if it's indeed the will of God, and that if he has any further work for us to do in this world, that he will keep us here to serve Him. To leave this world and be with Christ forever is a most exhilarating thought for us as believers; but for us to continue in the flesh is so much better for the church that remains here on earth. It's an interesting argument that David makes.

### **Verse 6 & 7:**

In verses 6 and 7 David writes, *"I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. My eye wastes away because of grief; it grows weak because of all my foes."* Wow. Now here's the guy who killed Goliath, the champion of Gath. This was once the kid who killed the bear and the lion. And here we see him weeping like a child. Why? Because in facing men and beasts, David was more than a conqueror. But when he wrestles against God, David finds that he is less than nothing.

The emotions which David describes in these sad verses are familiar to all of us. Every one of our saddened hearts is tempted to focus only on our grief and to shut God out.

Let's not lose sight though of the condition of David's heart in his plea to God in all this. Though we've looked at each verse within its context and tried to illuminate what was happening to David's heart in his petition, we are careful to remember that David was in a state of great brokenness and contrition over his sin before God. He prostrated himself before the Lord, crying out for God's Mercy; his very life depended upon it. He was sorry, he had been laid low and humbled by his sin, and in the next couple of verses, David's tone will shift towards a hatred of his sin.

### **Verse 8:**

In verses 8-10, we see a great example of true repentance where David turns away from sin and places himself well into the bosom of the Lord. David writes, "(8) *Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping.* (9) *The Lord has heard my plea; the Lord accepts my prayer.*". It's entirely possible that the sin that led David to this place of Divine chastisement had something to do with an association he had with the ungodly. It's likely by these words that David had found himself in league with the world and its sin and is now rebuking it while turning towards God. This is clearly a hallmark of TRUE repentance. The turning FROM sin and the turning TOWARD God. David finds peace and begins to "clean house". Repentance is a practical thing. It's not good enough just to lament the desecration of the temple of our hearts. No, we must take hold of the whip and purge the buyers and sellers and overturn the tables of the moneychangers. Redeemed sinners who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit will always grow in their *hatred* of the sin which cost our Lord Jesus His own blood.

David's mind had now been comforted by the Holy Spirit and he found confidence that his prayers had been heard. And why shouldn't he have this confidence? After all, the "peace of God" is the sweet reward of submissive prayer. What a privilege we have in Christ, when we pray from a place of contrition and submission!

Finally in verse 10, David finishes his prayer writing, "(10) *All my enemies shall be ashamed and greatly troubled; they shall turn back and be put to shame in a moment.*" Now of course, we must remember that the language of the old dispensation is not that of the new. On THIS side of the cross, we pray for our enemies, not against them. We are to pray that God would have mercy on them, and bring them into a saving knowledge of Christ.

The tone of the 10th verse is familiar: "(10) *All my enemies shall be ashamed and greatly troubled; they shall turn back and be put to shame in a moment*". Psalms that end in this manner instruct us as to who are in Christ and that we are to continually to look forward, and to console ourselves with anticipation of that final day, "when our warfare will be finished; when sin and sorrow will be no more; when darkness and everlasting confusion will consume the enemies of God; when the ashes and the sackcloth of the penitent will be traded in for robes of glory, and every tear will become a sparkling gem in our crown; when sighs and groans will give way to the songs of

heaven, set to the harps of angels, and where our faith will be completed in the vision of the Almighty.” (George Horne, paraphrased).