

Ezra Ch 9-10

As we enter into the book of Ezra having had a few weeks of other activities taking place let me briefly refresh your memory to the fact that Ezra himself is now apart of the equation. You recall that God had granted him favor with the king and he led a couple thousand more people back from Babylon to Jerusalem. But he found himself in quite a quandary because it was an incredibly dangerous trip with all kinds of marauders that made their living looting caravans and bandwagons out in the middle of nowhere, it's not like it was an overnight journey, it was 4 months of tedious travel. And what placed him in that position was the fact that he'd be witnessing to the king of how the hand of God was upon all those *for good* who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are *against* all those who *forsake* Him. And since he'd been sharing so boldly of God's ability to bless and take care of the lives of those who seek Him, and how His wrath is against those who don't, he felt like to ask for a military escort would be to compromise his witness. But the king had loaded him down with all kinds of treasure, articles for the temple, he had women and children with him, he was just in a difficult position. So what did he do? He proclaimed a fast, and he and the people with him prayed and sought the Lord, and the Lord answered their prayer, apparently promising protection and so they went. He divided the treasure up in the caravan to 12 different leaders and told them they would be responsible to give an account for it on the day of their arrival. And as chapter 8 draws to a close we find exactly that happening, they completed their journey to Jerusalem, took a few days to rest, and then everyone accounted for the gold/silver, articles for the temple, all the treasure that'd been entrusted to them, and gave support to the people and the house of God.

Vs1-3

That word "astonished" could've been translated, "devastated" he was appalled, stunned and stupefied, why? You have to remember that Ezra was a ready scribe; he was a student of the Word, one who copied the word, explained the essence of the word. He was one who wielded God's word with accuracy and authority; he was quick to not only *share* it, but to *submit* to it himself. And he was commissioned specifically by the king to go to Jerusalem and establish a system of law that honored and upheld the Word of God. Now Ezra's excited, he couldn't wait to get to the holy city, see all the things that God has been doing, encourage the people in the precepts and principles of the Word of God. God had *liberated* them, it wasn't too many years ago that they'd been in the throws of 70yrs of captivity, he no doubt anticipated, and *expected* to find the people of God, serving God with an intense fervency having learned the lesson of immorality and the dangers of flirting with idolatry. But instead to his own shock and chagrin, after he excitedly off loads all his support for the temple and the work of the Lord, the leaders come to him and say, "Uh, you're not going to want to hear this but, the people, the priests and the Levites aren't living lives of separation from the nations around us, as a matter of fact they're intermingling and intermarrying with these pagan nations." And all Ezra can think is, "What? What are you talking about!"

This is the very reason we went into captivity in the 1st place, and God in His mercy has released us and all we can do is spit in His face by going right back to the very things that made for our initial demise, I can't believe it, not only the people, but the priests... and the Levites!"

Few things with that, #1 you need to realize that leaders in the body of Christ are dealing with the same sin nature as you are, and they are not insusceptible or impervious to falling.

I agree whole heartedly that leaders in the body are called to set a standard and need to be people that we can look *to*, and glean *from* as to what it means to lead lives set apart to Christ. But never deceive yourself into thinking that a deacon, or an elder, or the pastor *is* the standard, yes they should be *setting* a standard, but they themselves are not the standard, Jesus Christ alone is the standard. And it's important that we distinguish the difference because too often people put way more weight into a particular leader's life than what is healthy *for themselves*, consequently when a leader falls, a whole host of people stumble over that fact and fall right behind him. But if I keep my focus steadfast upon Christ, then when a certain leader falls, though tragic, it won't derail me as well because *he's* not the one I follow *specifically*. He was a real encouragement to me *personally*, but my relationship to God isn't based upon his walk *exclusively*.

Now having said that, that in no way shape of form releases those in leadership from their responsibility before the body to be setting that standard practically of that which the bible teaches principally. We need that tangible example as to how the word of God can be lived out in our everyday lives. And as it pertains to leaders, this type of sin is particularly heinous because to whom much is given, much is required, when you're brought into a certain light, and then refuse to walk in that light, it's a very dangerous position to take. It's something that I've consistently tried to pound into my oldest son, and the rest will get the same lesson, I'm sure you taught your kids the same, with privilege comes what? "Responsibility." Being a leader is a great privilege, but with that comes great responsibility. If there's anyone that people in the body of Christ should be able to look to as to what it means to lead lives of separation from the world, it should be the leadership, and sad is the day that even the leaders are not only fallen, but *foremost* in the transgression.

But listen, regardless of what that leader does as it pertains to sin, you're to persevere in Christ. The bible teaches the general responsibility of separation to *all of us*, notice here it wasn't just the leadership it was the "laypeople" as well. The bible teaches us that we're to be what? "In the world, but not *of* the world." And that's where human responsibility comes in, the Divine initiative is to take you out of the world *positionally*, you're in Christ, *positionally* sanctified, but the translation of that sanctification in your life practically is your responsibility. What I mean by that is that God's not going to force you to not have sex outside of marriage, that's your responsibility, He's not going to force you to not intermingle in a personal relationship (boyfriend/girlfriend,) or even marry a non-believer, that's your responsibility.

He won't force you to be honest on your time card at work, or take the proper amount of time for breaks, that's your responsibility. Now we realize that it's the work of the Spirit in us, and overflowing from us, but you have to submit to His work in your life. We're told, "*Pursue... holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.*" Heb 12:14 John tells us, "...everyone who has this hope in Him (That is Christ) *purifies himself, just as He is pure.*" 1 John 3:3. And again, "...let us cleanse *ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*" 2 Cor 7:1 So these are just a few vs that deal with human responsibility as it pertains to practical sanctification, you have a choice to be obedient to the Word of God or not. "Come out from among them, says the Lord, and be separate, don't touch what is unclean, and I'll receive you, you'll be My sons and my daughters." God gives you a choice.

Now in this case it had even added detriment because God had promised Messiah to come through Israel, so when Israel began to mix and mingle with other nations, they were placing their lineage in jeopardy. So the idea here isn't one of interracial marriages for you and me, God has no issue with that, because the only race that exists in His eyes is the human race.

This was something specifically delegated to the nation of Israel for #1 prophetic reasons pertaining to the Messiah, but then also there was the practical reason that applies to us. These other nations served other gods; so to you and me it would be what fellowship has light with darkness, believer with non-believer, the temple of God with idols. We're not to enter into relationships with the non-believing world around us. It's not saying don't share Christ with them, it's saying don't become intimately/personally involved with them. Or else as we see here, they'll begin to compromise your witness, and jeopardize your relationship with God.

Ezra heard these things, and he was bummed, grieved. Remember his name means "Helper" so as a "Type" characteristically we see a picture of the Holy Spirit in him here and there. Here the sin of God's people grieved him deeply, Eph 4 teaches us that we're not to grieve the Holy Spirit by sin in our lives, or the way we treat our brothers and sisters in the Lord. Ezra tore his garment as a sign of the rending of his heart, tore out some of his hair and his beard and just sat there dismayed, staring numbly into nothingness. Would to God that sin would be so grievous to us, I don't remember the last time I ripped hair out of my head over my own sin, much less the sins of others in the body. Ezra was broken, not for himself, he'd done nothing wrong, but for those who'd fallen around him. So what did he do? He did exactly what the Holy Spirit does for you and for me, he didn't come *against* them, but rather he began to pray, stand in the gap, and intercede *for* them. The bible says, "*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*" Gal 6:1-2 It's so easy to divorce yourself from a situation and just let people deal with their own problems, Ezra didn't do that, he began to bear the burden *for* them, pray on behalf *of* them, and notice what happened.

Vs4

The way he reacted began to impact everyone around him, and people began to be suddenly sobered up as to the gravity of the situation. No doubt Ezra was quick to remind them of what God had told them in His Word, how that when they came into the land they weren't to tolerate the nations around them, or make any covenants with them, the book of Deuteronomy says, "*Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly.*" Deut 7:3-4. And we love this phrase regarding everyone who "trembled" at the Words of the God of Israel. The fear of God is in many ways a missing ingredient in so many of our lives today, yet a healthy fear of God will breed holiness and purity in our lives. To understand that God says what He means, and He means what He says, that He's holy and righteous and judges sin. But too often we misinterpret the God's grace, and His giving us that opportunity to repent *from* sin, as God's tolerance *for* sin. "He must be ok with it because nothing's happening." There's no fear of God, or fear of His Word in an attitude like that, and to take that position will ultimately lead to our own destruction.

Some believe that perhaps Ezra wrote Ps 119, that Psalm that's just all consumed with and focused on the word of God. We read there where the Psalmist wrote, "*Rivers of water run down from my eyes, Because men do not keep Your law.*" We read in Isaiah where the Lord said, "*But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word.*" Isa 66:2 These guys began to gather around him, the fear of God at rest upon them over the sin of the nation, notice.

Vs5-6

Translation, "We're drowning in our own iniquities, our sins have risen above our heads, we're being consumed *in* them, overwhelmed *by* them, and I'm ashamed, too humiliated to even look up towards the heavens."

Which sort of reminds us of that tax collector that Jesus spoke of that wouldn't even so much as raise his eyes to the heavens but just smote his chest and said, "God be merciful to me, a sinner..." Jesus said that that man went away justified. Notice a couple things here real quick, #1 We read that Ezra was fasting, and he fasted until the evening sacrifice. Fasting can be for different periods of time, perhaps a meal, or a certain type of food, sometimes an afternoon, or morning, that's not really the issue, that part is between you and God. But the objective is always the same and that's to deny the flesh and seek the Lord, the things of the Spirit. You can't fast and take in a movie, or pull up to the X-box, or kick on the "Big Dog" or whatever, that defeats the point, it's starving the flesh physically, but feeding it at the same time through a different avenue. So when you fast, make sure you're able to devote that time primarily towards prayer, or studying the Word, or meditating/concentrating on the things of the Spirit, things of that nature.

The other thing I'd have you see here is that though Ezra was not guilty of *any* of these things, he included himself before God in the violation of *all* of these things. He recognized corporate/national responsibility before God which they as a people had failed in. When a kicker misses the field goal at the end of the game and loses the game by 1 pt or whatever, it's not the kicker that loses; it's the whole team. When a nation goes to war, the whole nation isn't fighting, but the whole nation wins or loses based upon the outcome, there's a national identity there. Same thing here, Ezra personally didn't violate the Lord, but he recognizes that Israel as a nation (of which he's apart of) did. So he doesn't try to justify himself while condemning the others. He pleads with God from the personal perspective. "Our iniquities, Our guilt." Bearing the burden with them and so fulfilling the law of Christ, and we note that his intercession begins with what? Confession, confession always precedes forgiveness, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" 1 John 1:9 And note as we go through that Ezra never offers any justification for the situation, just confession, nor does he ask for God's favor. He just completely casts themselves upon God's mercy acknowledging His righteousness, and how they deserve whatever chastisement God should choose to impose upon them.

Vs7-12

What are the 2 main things that Ezra continues to highlight in this his prayer? #1 Their great guilt and #2 God's great grace. "God from the very beginning we've rebelled against you, even to the point of our being taken into captivity, undergoing years of humility as it is to this day. And yet for all that you've given us this window of grace, that there might be a remnant to escape our bondage, that You might enlighten our eyes, and give us a measure of revival in our bondage." Notice that, it's God who enlightens the eyes, and brings revival to us in our bondage. The church may hold meetings whereby they seek to evangelize the lost, but those can't be called, "Revivals" because in order for something to be revived it had to be alive once before. The world is *dead* in sin, revival is for the believer, whereby God performs spiritual CPR on us, enlightening our eyes, breathing into our lives by His Spirit to revive and refresh our souls.

Look at vs 9, "We were slaves, You didn't forsake us, we were in bondage, You extended mercy..." I love that, the gracious and merciful hand of God extended to us even in the midst of our slavery, and bondage to sin, it's a prodigal picture of sorts. "God You've been good to us, we've walked out on You, we've gone and ensnared and entangled ourselves again in sin, yet Your mercies are new and available to us every mourning." And notice the purpose for God's goodness and mercy extended our direction, it's 4 fold there in vs 9, "To Revive us, Repair us, Rebuild us, and give us a wall," or we'll say, "Reestablish us."

It's that renewing, refreshing, restoring work of God in our all but dead, rundown, and destroyed lives, we tear down, but God in His mercy builds up.

And Ezra says, You've done all this for us, and how have we repaid You? By forsaking Your commandments again, going right back into the very things that made for our judgment the 1st time in taking the abominations of the nations around us into our heritage. We've taken them as wives, or their sons to our daughters, sought their peace and their prosperity rather than Your peace, and Your prosperity. And such is the hideous tendency of human nature, after all that God has done for us, how often we forsake Him to follow after our own flesh, God help us.

Vs13-15

Now Ezra could've gotten upset with the people (which I'm sure he was) but he could've vented on them, began preaching *at* them, but he opted for the most powerful thing he could do which was to pray *for* them. Sometimes people ask me what they can do for a loved one who's not walking with the Lord, or a friend that's entangled in sin. And the most powerful thing you can do for your spouse, or your family, or this place, or anyone is to pray for them. You can reason with them, give God's Word to them, and all those things are awesome, but that which is of primary importance is to pray for them. Sometimes people don't want to hear God's Word, won't receive God's Word, they're not willing to reason or rationalize, but prayer can't be rejected, or not accepted. Because that's between you and God, so intercessory prayer is a powerful tool that God has equipped us with, and notice what happens.

Ch 10

Vs1

Man this is a powerful scene isn't it? Ezra is praying and confessing, weeping and bowing down/humbling himself before the house of God. And this massive crowd begins to gather around and they're all weeping and wailing over the condition of the nation, how they've fallen having rejected God's Word and His ways for their lives.

Vs2-4

In other words, "You're the one who's been sent here with the legal authority to impose God's law, take care of business and we'll be behind you." But you guys these are the painful ramifications of sin, these are more than words in a book, it represents the pulling apart of families, kids being told goodbye by their dads, wives being sent away for good, it's no small thing. But the wages of sin are heavy, and they impact people's lives, but what's happening here is revival through repentance. Shechaniah is saying, "As a nation we want to repent, and the fruit of our repentance is to right where we've wronged." He wasn't just saying have everyone say they repent and that'll be good enough, repentance is demonstrated by a change in my life. We're to bear fruits worthy of repentance; repentance will surface in not only an inward transformation, but an outward demonstration in the way I lead my life.

Now if you're married to a non-believer and you're wondering if you should divorce them, the answer is, "No." The NT makes it clear that if they're willing to live with you, let them do so, if they leave, that's their choice, then you're free. But you're not to seek that separation, you should've never married them in the 1st place, but now that you've made that commitment, as much as it depends upon you, you're to keep the commitment. If there's adultery in the equation, the bible gives you the ok, if you're being physically abused, I believe the heart of God would call you to remove yourself from that circumstance as well, we've not been called to bondage, but to peace.

Other than that if you're married you're to stay married. I would suppose that the better advice here may've been that the husbands were to be the spiritual leader of their homes and they were to serve the Lord, and that's the way it was going to be. And if the wife opted out, that was her choice but as for me and my house we're going to serve the Lord. However the bible doesn't mention anything negative about Ezra's choice here with Schechaniah so I don't want to either, the point here is that Israel had sown to the wind, they were reaping the whirlwind and now they were repenting, and the outward demonstration of their inward transformation was evidencing itself in separating themselves from their sinful situation.

Vs5-12

Now to bring this home, perhaps you haven't entered into a believer/non-believer marriage; even if you have you're not to seek a way out as we just said. But perhaps you've entangled yourself in an unhealthy hobby, or you're married (if you will) to a bad habit, you've transgressed against the Lord. Make confession to the Lord and do His will; separate yourself from that circumstance, or that situation, that particular pattern, don't make provision for your flesh, cut that aspect of your life off and follow God whole heartedly. That's what Ezra is saying here, and the people acknowledged the need for it, said, "Yes" we'll do it.

Vs13-15

We don't know if that means they opposed the decision to give time, or the decision to put away their wives, so I can't really comment on that. But the basic gist here is that there's a lot of people who've done this, it's not really an overnight deal, give us sometime to make this right. Plus there were provisions in the law to marry a foreign individual if they were a proselyte, if they worshipped the God of Israel, Ruth was a Moabitess, married Boaz and was apart of the ancestry (humanly speaking) of Jesus. So they're saying, "Let an investigation be done, rather than a blanket sweep, those who legitimately have transgressed need to make it right, those who have believing wives ought not be penalized just because they're not Jewish." And so that's exactly what happened, notice.

Vs16-19

And the remainder of the book goes on to tell the names of the other legitimate cases where the men had to put away their wives, some of them having children. Some choose to see it as a list of shame and condemnation, I see it more as a list of commendation, they'd sinned, but they repented, bore fruits worthy of that, God made record of it. And when we sin, God knows what's going on, and should we confess it, forsake it, repent of it, God keeps record of that to. And so the book of Ezra comes to an end with order being established for at least 1 more generation in Israel.

Prayer Points:

God we thank You for this demonstration in Your Word of the riches of Your mercy. We're so easily ensnared by sin, we so quickly forsake intimacy with You, yet You're so eager to forgive, to restore, and to revive. God revive us, make of us a people who grieve over sin, who intercede for our brothers and sisters, or those in need of You around us. And I pray Lord for anyone here tonight in need of repair, or rebuilding, or re-establishing, that You would do that work. May we lead lives worthy of the calling with which You've called us, bearing fruits worthy of repentance, may we be separated unto You.