

June 2, 2024

Ezra 9:5-15

5 And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garment and my cloak torn, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the Lord my God, 6 saying: “O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. 7 From the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt. And for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plundering, and to utter shame, as it is today. 8 But now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant and to give us a secure hold within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our slavery. 9 For we are slaves. Yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to grant us some reviving to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem.

10 “And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments, 11 which you commanded by your servants the prophets, saying, ‘The land that you are entering, to take possession of it, is a land impure with the impurity of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations that have filled it from end to end with their uncleanness. 12 Therefore do not give your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters for your sons, and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever.’ 13 And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, seeing that you, our God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserved and have given us such a remnant as this, 14 shall we break your commandments again and intermarry with the peoples who practice these abominations? Would you not be angry with us until you consumed us, so that there should be no remnant, nor any to escape? 15 O Lord, the God of Israel, you are just, for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as it is today. Behold, we are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this.”

Scriptures for further study:

Matthew 6:7-13

1 Timothy 1:15

John 16:7-11

“We should note how the prayer moved from the general to the specific in its confession of sin.”

- Derek Thomas

In the Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible note for Ezra 9:11-12 we read that “The citation [in these verses] is not a quotation of a single text but a summary of the theology of separation culled from numerous texts (e.g. Leviticus 18:25; Dt.4:5; 7:3; 18:9; 27:23; 2 Kings 21:16).”



The Hand of God and Corporate Repentance **Ezra 9:5-15**

BIG IDEA: Since the salvation that God brings for us includes the building of the corporate church, then we need to ask the Spirit to move us to corporate repentance.

OUTLINE

1. General Confession of Sin (9:5-7)
2. Celebrating God’s Faithfulness (9:8-9)
3. Specific Confession of Sin (9:10-15)

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These “Sermon Discussion Questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. Sometimes we as Christians forget the corporate nature of our salvation and only focus on our personal salvation. Why is this the case?
2. Why is it significant that Ezra uses the pronoun “I” in the beginning of his prayer in this passage, but switches to “we” and “our”? What does this teach us about the need to repent?
3. What is the focus of Ezra’s prayer in verses 8-9?
4. What does the use of the term “remnant” teach us about God?
5. What specific sins does Ezra confess in verses 10-15? How does Ezra end this prayer in verse 15?
6. What have you learned about God from this passage?
7. How does the gospel encourage us to repent as individuals and as the Church?

“When we feel terrible about our sin, we should confess it, then look to God. Look to Christ and celebrate His mercy and faithfulness to you. Proclaim His sufficiency. Worship and trust in Him.”

- James Hamilton

“Only a return to the gospel can cure this kind of guilty, casting oneself on the mercy of God in Jesus with a heartfelt commitment that he should have everything there is of us. That is what Ezra now calls us to do.”

- Derek Thomas

Praise to Jesus. Praise God this week for the victory we have in the gospel of our Lord Jesus over sin and death. Praise Him for not leaving us in our sin, but instead, “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

Repentance through Jesus. Romans 2:4 points out “that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance.” Therefore, let us ask God to give us a fresh awareness of His kindness to lead us to repentance. Ask God to lead us to a right view of our sins that leads to our repentance of our personal sins and the sins of the Church. Include in your prayer time this week times of personal and corporate repentance.

Consecration for Jesus. Romans 12:1 says that we are to offer ourselves as living sacrifices “by the mercies of God,” or the NIV puts it this way, “in view of God’s mercy.” Therefore, let us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, understand God’s mercies that are new every day (Lamentations 3:22-23) to then lead us to live for God and not for ourselves.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

From Ezra 9:1-5, Ezra receives news that the returnees have intermarried with women from neighboring unbelieving people. The news is painful because not only the people but their leaders, the priests, and the Levites have also intermarried. Ezra, a leader among his people, takes charge of the situation. He leads his people in profound repentance before the Lord for disobeying His laws concerning intermarriage with surrounding nations. This act of repentance is not just a formality but a genuine expression of sorrow and a commitment to change. It is not just repentance but sorrowful reparation that marks the end of this glimpse into the reestablished remnant of God’s people.

(Ezra 9:5-15) Ezra approaches God based on a whole history of God's covenant promises, but also as one who trembles at God's words (Ezra 9:3; 10:3; see also Isa. 66:2, 5). He shows the need for an intercessor on behalf of a sinful people. Ezra himself only foreshadows that role, trusting in God's "favor" or "grace" (Ezra 9:8), which brightens the very heart of this prayer just as it brightened the eyes of these slaves allowed by God to return home (v. 8).

-Adapted from the ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible.

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

These questions are written to aid parents in leading family devotions with their children.

1. What is repentance? (Repentance is about turning away from our sin and turning towards God. The Westminster Confession of Faith states in Chapter 15 that “Repentance which leads to life is the blessed product of the gospel working in believers’ lives...In this repentance, the sinner is able to see his sins as God sees them, as filthy and hateful and as involving great danger...Understanding that God in Christ is merciful to those who repent.”)

2. Whose sins does Ezra confess in his prayer in this passage? (Ezra repents of the sins of the Israelites. Remind your children of the discussion from last week’s passage that the sin of the Israelites was not primarily about who they married. The sin was that their marriages led them to worship false gods. God had warned them in His Law that they should not do this. Make sure to talk with your children about how this passage leads us to pray for God’s People (the Church) as a whole and not just pray for ourselves. Part of this corporate prayer is to repent of the sins of the corporate Church.)

3. Why is repentance a sign of the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives? (When God the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives, then we begin to see our lives and our world as He sees them. This means that we see the depth of our sin in light of God’s holiness. This is why we are led to confess our sins and repent.)

Scriptures for further study:

1 Peter 2:9-10

John 16:7-11

1 John 1:8-9

FOR STUDENTS

- 1 Why was Ezra so upset? Why did he feel humiliated?
2. Read Ezra's prayer (Ezra 9:6-15) and comment on repeated words and key words. How would you sum up what Ezra is saying about God's people and about God?
3. What is the significance of Ezra's posture before God? What does it evidence about His character?
4. What thanksgiving does Ezra evoke in his prayer? Reference Ezra 9:9-10.
5. How did Ezra expect God to react? Would God have been justified in doing this?
6. What was Ezra's view of God (verse 15)?
7. What lessons can we learn about sin and confession from Ezra's prayer?

FOR SEEKERS AND NEW BELIEVERS

1. Ezra's prayer of confession is in no way self-righteous, pointing out only the sins of others. He uses phrases like "our sins" and "our guilt" (vv.6-7).

QUESTION: Why is it good and right to consider our collective sins and to pray corporate prayers of confession?

QUESTION: Why is it also good that we confess our individual sins and be as specific as possible too?

2. Notice that Ezra's prayer of repentance and renewal is not about earning God's favor but rather a response to the graciousness of God, who had just allowed them to return home from exile and had "granted them new life" (v.9)

(v.9)

QUESTION: Why is it important to see our holy living as a response to God's favor? How does this provide a powerful motivation?

3. Ezra understands that intermarrying with non-believers (and adopting their practices) is a sin, but He knows this to be a sin because He knows the teaching of God's word, which expressly forbids such things.

QUESTION: Why is the Bible necessary in order to truly understand sin and see it for what it is?

4. We often hear the expression that Christians are to be "in the world but not of it."

QUESTION: What do you think this means, and how does this apply to our most meaningful relationships, including marriage?

5. Often, when Christians endeavor to live their life in a way that honors God, they are charged with being legalistic.

QUESTION: What do you think is the fundamental difference(s) between legalism and holiness?

6. Why is confessing our sin both difficult and also refreshing?

The Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People



The Ancient of Days, William Blake, 1794.

About the artwork:

The Ancient of Days, found in prophecies of Daniel, is the subject of William Blake's engraving in which he shows us the Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People, the sermon series title for Ezra.

The Ancient of Days is the cover art for Blake's Poem *Europe: a Prophecy* (1794). The Ancient of Days is a name for God the Father, whom the prophet Daniel spoke of in Daniel 7, where he saw Jesus, the Son of Man, "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." This artistic rendering by Blake serves to encourage God's people to know that He is still active and on the move with His plan of redemption despite their surroundings and circumstances.

William Blake (1757-1827) was committed to bringing prophecies and visions of the God of the Bible to life; the poet, printmaker, and painter was unrecognized and died impoverished. Despite their circumstances, William and his devoted wife Catherine, whom he taught to read and write, enjoyed a happy marriage and life together.

As a child, he came home one day and told his parents he saw "a tree filled with angels, bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars." His middle-class mom and dad greatly loved him and all their seven children but didn't appreciate their son's story. Only the pleas of his mom saved him from the "beating" his dad said he deserved! Blake's visions continued throughout his fifty years. Among his many visions, Blake saw Christ with his Apostles and a great procession of monks and priests and heard their chant." He saw "God's face pressed against his window, seeing angels among the haystacks, and being visited by the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel." Blake believed the Bible was the most significant work of poetry ever written. It was the basis for the art. His love for the Bible and his visions were the stuff of a vast collection of visual and literary art through which Blake attempted to describe "the body of God."

Barker, (2004) (Barker, William Blake 1757-1827, 2004)

Today, William Blake is considered one of the greatest poets in the English language and one of the most original visual artists of his day.