

Ezra's Prayer of Confession

Text: Ezra 9:6-15

Introduction:

1. Ezra 9 and 10 form a new section in the Book and concern the exposing of grievous sin amongst the remnant and Ezra's godly response to it. We could summarize Ezra's godly response to sin in three words:
 - Contrition
 - Confession
 - Covenant
2. In our last message we studied how the sin was exposed to godly Ezra and how he responded with godly sorrow. Ezra takes the initiative and sets the example as a spiritual leader and leads the people of God in a heartfelt, humble prayer of confession. Note the word 'confession' in Ez. 10:1.
3. Ezra 9 takes its place alongside Daniel 9 and Nehemiah 9 as one of the great confession chapters of the Bible. These chapters bring us to the heart and soul of what it really means to humble ourselves before God over our sin.
4. We will study this great prayer of confession under four headings.

Ezra confesses...

I. THE SHAMEFULNESS OF THEIR SIN (VS. 6-7)

Ezra speaks of:

A. The Humiliation of their Sins (Vs. 6a)

1. Sin always brings a nation low. Prov. 14:34 **"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people."**
2. While Ezra felt a deep sense of shame over the sins of the nation, yet he was able to approach Almighty God on the basis of his relationship with Him – "O my God". In like manner, we come before God as our Heavenly Father to pray "And forgive us our sins" (Luke 11:4).
3. "I am ashamed and blush" = Ezra was shocked (Vs. 3b, 4b) and ashamed by the sin of the nation. There is something desperately wrong when sin doesn't bother us anymore! Jeremiah 6:15 **"Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD."**
4. It was a good sign that Ezra could blush with shame over the sins of the people. **"Words and actions that would have made earlier generations blush in shame are today part of the normal entertainment diet of the average TV viewer. When a nation**

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turns sin into entertainment and laughs at what ought to make us weep, we are in desperate need of revival.” (Wiersbe)

B. The Height of their Sins (Vs. 6b)

Ezra confesses the enormity of their sins with two word pictures:

1. Their iniquities were increased over their heads.
2. Their trespasses were grown up to the heavens.
3. True confession means being honest, humble and accurate with God about the seriousness of our sin. This is the opposite of attempting to minimize and cover over sin. Prov. 28:13 “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh *them* shall have mercy.”
4. Notice that Ezra does not say “their iniquities” and “their trespasses” but “our iniquities” and “our trespass”. He confesses the sin of the nation as a whole and includes himself as a part of that sinful nation.

C. The History of their Sins (Vs. 7)

1. The pattern of their sins as a nation (Vs. 7a)
Ezra plainly acknowledges that as a nation they had a history of sinning grievously against God. He confesses the culpability of every level of Jewish society:
 - a. The people – ‘we’.
 - b. The kings – “our kings”. While Israel had some godly kings, she had many kings who lead the people into deep depravity and wickedness.
 - c. The priests – “and our priests”. Sadly, those who were meant to be the spiritual leaders and examples of purity in the nation were also involved in the abominations of the heathen.
2. The punishment of their sins as a nation (Vs. 7b)
Because of their sin the chastening hand of God had come upon them and they had been delivered into the hands of heathen kings.
 - a. “To the sword”
 - b. “To captivity”
 - c. “To a spoil” = refers to plunder. Their sins had stripped them of everything precious.
 - d. “To confusion of face” = refers to shame.

Ezra confesses...

II. THE UNGRATEFULNESS OF THEIR SIN (VS. 8-10)

The enormity of their sins is further emphasized when considered in the light of God’s grace and goodness that had been shown to the nation.

God’s grace had given the people of God:

A. A Remnant (Vs. 8a)

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1. “grace hath been shewed from the LORD our God” = the “exceeding sinfulness of sin” is seen clearly when it is considered in the light of what God’s grace has done in our lives. Grace will not teach you to sin. Grace will teach you to live holy. Titus 2:11-12 “For **the grace of God** that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, **Teaching us** that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;”
2. “to leave us a remnant to escape” = Ezra is acknowledging that the remnant in Judea was there only by the grace of God. It was not something they deserved.
3. God had given them “a nail in this holy place”. The word for ‘nail’ means a nail or tent peg such as that employed by Jael to kill Sisera (Judg. 4:21), but is also used metaphorically as here. The same word is used repeatedly in reference to the ‘pins’ of the tabernacle and is also translated “stake” in Isaiah (33:20; 54:2). It has the idea of “a constant and sure abode in his holy place” which was the Temple (M.K. Hall). Albert Barnes writes, “The metaphor is probably drawn from a tent-pin, which is driven into the earth to make the tent firm and secure.”

B. A Reviving (Vs. 8b-10)

1. The description of their reviving (Vs. 8b)
 - a. “that our God may lighten our eyes” = the word ‘lighten’ means “to enlighten”. The same word is translated ‘enlightened’ in several places. For example, 1 Samuel 14:27 “But Jonathan heard not when his father charged the people with the oath: wherefore he put forth the end of the rod that was in his hand, and dipped it in an honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his eyes were **enlightened**.” God’s gracious ministry of enlightening our eyes in His truth is never to be taken for granted.
 - b. “and give us a little reviving in our bondage” = while the revival is described as ‘little’ it does not mean it was insignificant. We have seen the record in Ezra God’s hand moved so powerfully and wonderfully on behalf of His people to raise up this remnant. But it was a small work when compared to some of the glory days of Israel’s history (e.g., Solomon’s temple). But the “little reviving” God had given them was significant, precious and an act of God’s grace.
 - c. Do not despise “little revivings”! Any revival, no matter how small it might be in size and scope can only take place by the power and grace of God. While we may not see a revival on the same scale as some of the large revivals of church history at this apostate hour, I believe we can by God’s grace experience a “little reviving” as a part of God’s faithful remnant. When man

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does something 'little' it is tiny and insignificant but when Almighty God does something "little" it is significant, powerful and great. A "little reviving" from the hand of God is a big for us as God's people.

- d. Note: It is of interest to note that in verse 8 that the reviving came as a result of the rebuilt temple but in verse 9 the order is reversed. God revived a remnant and worked through the Persian kings to allow the temple to be rebuilt. Such reviving was the cause of the setting up of the house of their God. So, the people of God were stirred up in order to rebuild the house of God and then once the house of God was built, there was further revival blessing they enjoyed from the rebuilt temple. The point is we need a continual work of reviving in our lives as God's people.
2. The details of their reviving (Vs. 9)
Look at the catalogue of what God had done on their behalf:
 - a. God had not forsaken them in their bondage.
 - b. God had granted the favour in the eyes of the Persian kings.
 - c. God had enabled them to repair and rebuild the temple.
 - d. God had given them protection – "a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem". Note: Literal walls were yet to be rebuilt under Nehemiah which follows the timeline of Ezra chronologically. The word 'wall' is used in the same sense as the word 'nail' in verse 8. God had given them a place of safety and protection.
 3. The disregard of their reviving (Vs. 10)
 - a. In spite of all God had done for them, they had disobeyed God's Word and were now in a desperate state.
 - b. It is a solemn reminder of our potential even if we have experienced God's reviving work in the past. The fact you have known God's power working in your life does not exempt you from sinning grievously against God! There are Christians who knew God's reviving work in the past who are now living in bitterness and rebellion to God's truth. Apart from God's grace, any one of us could do just as foolishly!

Ezra confesses...

III. THE WAYWARDNESS OF THEIR SIN (VS. 11-12)

Ezra now acknowledges that the sin of the people was a direct violation of God's clear commands. True confession deals with sin plainly in the light of God's Word. Ezra's prayer reflects his familiarity and understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures. Ezra's saturation in the Scriptures (Ez. 7:10) was the key behind his sensitivity to sin and his supplication before

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God. While there is some direct quotation of Scripture, the majority of this part of his prayer is a summation of numerous Scriptures. The wisdom of the Word was woven into the fabric of his prayer. God's Word was crystal clear about:

A. The Perversity of the Canaanites (Vs. 11)

Their depravity was:

1. Vile (Vs. 11a)

The depravity and wickedness of the people of the land is described in plain terms.

- a. "unclean land"
- b. "filthiness"
- c. "abominations"
- d. "uncleanness"
- e. We know from Leviticus 18 that their abominations included immorality, adultery, sodomy and bestiality. The word 'nakedness' occurs 24 times in this one chapter. The perversion of sexuality is one of the primary manifestations of a godless, pagan society.
- f. Lev. 18:24-28 "Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and **the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants**. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit *any* of these abominations; *neither* any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you: (For all these abominations have the men of the land done, which *were* before you, and the land is defiled;) That the land **spue** not you out also, when ye defile it, as it **spued out** the nations that *were* before you."

2. Vast (Vs. 11b)

- a. It wasn't that these sins were confined to isolated pockets within Canaan, they were widespread and pervasive – "which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness". When the "vile" (Rom. 1:26) sins of Sodom are spread from coast to coast in a nation, you know that nation is pagan.
- b. In our day, the sins of Sodom are no longer confined to a few slummy streets in the major cities of our country but are now being promoted at about every level of society from pre-school to politics. The politicians claim the electorate is becoming more "progressive" but in reality, it is "regressive". We are not going forward morally and spiritually but are regressing back into the same old depraved sins that brought God's judgment upon these ancient civilizations in Canaan.

B. The Prohibition concerning the Canaanites (Vs. 12)

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1. The basis of the command (Vs. 12a)
 - a. 'therefore' = in light of the wickedness of the Canaanites described in the previous verse, God's command to His people concerning marriage makes perfect sense. Unequal yokes with an amoral people would quickly weaken and undermine the morals of God's people.
 - b. There is a direct citation of Deuteronomy 7:3 here – "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son."
 - c. King Solomon is an example of a man whose heart was turned away from the Lord by his pagan wives. 1 Kings 11:1-3 "**But king Solomon loved many strange women**, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, *and* Hittites; **Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love.** And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and **his wives turned away his heart.**" Apart from the fact Solomon had 999 wives too many, the women he married were pagan idolaters who influenced him with their pagan beliefs and practices.
2. The blessings of the command (Vs. 12b)

Obedience to the Lord would bring blessings. There is much wisdom in following God's ways! The heart and intent behind God's command in this area was in order that His people might be blessed with:

 - a. A strength in the land – "that ye may be strong". See the link between separation from the world and spiritual strength? If you lie your head in the lap of the world, it will quickly shave off the locks of your strength and you will be weak and powerless. In these days of apostasy, it is time to be stronger in separation, not weaker and yet many are doing the exact opposite. The collapse of separatism amongst IFB's has led to tragic weakness and powerlessness. God's power rests upon genuine holiness but it is quickly retracted from those who walk in disobedience.
 - b. A satisfaction in the land – "eat the good of the land". Obedience to God is a life of true blessing and satisfaction. What blessings abound for those who walk uprightly! (Psalm 84:11) The devil tries to lead Christians to believe that a holy, consecrated life is a joyless life of bondage. In reality, the opposite is true!

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- c. An inheritance in the land – “and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever.” They would have something to pass on to the next generation. Remember, its not just your life which is at stake when it comes to following God. If we drift from the old paths of truth and blessing, what will happen to the next generation?

Ezra confesses...

IV. THE FOOLISHNESS OF THEIR SIN (VS. 13-15)

Note the word ‘again’ in verse 14. In spite of all the history of God’s dealings with them as a nation, they had foolishly sinned against Him again. They had gone back into sin in spite of:

A. The Chastening of God (Vs. 13a)

1. Ezra acknowledges that the 70-year Babylonian captivity was because of these very kinds of sins. Now they were foolishly going back to those same sins!
2. See 2 Chronicles 36:11-17

B. The Compassion of God (Vs. 13b)

1. God had shown mercy – “thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve”. God hadn’t given them all the punishment they deserved and yet they sinned against Him. Do you see the picture? They sinned against a Good and Gracious God!
2. God had shown them grace – “and hast given us such deliverance as this”. Not only had God not given them all they did deserve, He graciously gave them what they didn’t deserve. Yet in spite of the mercy, grace and goodness of God, they had still chosen to sin against Him.
3. Note: Always remember that when you sin, you are not sinning against a cruel, unjust and evil god but you are sinning against a loving, faithful, gracious and merciful God.

C. The Character of God (Vs. 14-15)

Ezra knew something of the righteous character of God and was full of godly fear.

1. God’s righteous anger (Vs. 14)
 - a. Ezra questions how they could sin again so treacherously against their God (Vs. 14a)
 - b. Ezra knows the anger of God would be kindled against their sin and anticipates that He may well judge them afresh (Vs. 14b)
2. God’s Righteous Person (Vs. 15)
 - a. Ezra confesses the truth of the absolute and perfect righteousness of God. True confession means seeing my sinfulness in contrast to God’s perfect righteousness.

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- b. Ezra then casts himself and the nation upon the mercy of God. He stands there in humility and in dependence upon God for the situation.
- c. The confession was the first important step but the people of God would need to also put their repentance into practical action and deal with the sin. That's where the events of chapter 10 come in.

Conclusion: What kind of perspective do we have on sin? Do we see sin from man's perspective or God's perspective? How important is humility and confession of sin to you? If we are going to know revival in our homes and churches, we need to deal humbly, plainly and honestly with sin before God.