

# Repentance and Revival

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[ 0 : 00 ] Amen. Ezra chapter 9, as we continue to go chapter by chapter and verse by verse through this book, verses 1 through 15, the entire chapter.

Would you please stand with me as we honor the reading of God's Word together. After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the people of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness, the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost.

As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled.

Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice.

[ 1 : 26 ] 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, saying, Oh my God, I am ashamed and blushed 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. 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 hands of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plundering and to utter shame as it is today.

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 this holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us little reviving in our slavery.

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.

And now, oh our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments, which you commanded by your servants, the prophets, saying, the land that you are entering to take possession of, to take possession of it is a land impure with the impurity of the peoples of the land, with their abominations that have filled it from end to end with their uncleanness.

[ 3 : 05 ] 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.

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, shall we break your commandments again and intermarry with these people 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? Oh Lord, the God of Israel, you are just, for we are left a remnant that has escaped as is today.

Behold, we are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this. May God add a blessing to the reading of this word.

Would you please be seated? Some of us remember a time when every year, every few years, the church hosted revivals, which usually began on a Sunday night and then would go into the rest of the week.

[ 4 : 24 ] Typically, a dynamic speaker from out of town was brought in to preach. I remember we called them evangelists, and revivals were how they made their living.

At some point, probably in the mid-90s, church revivals began to lose momentum. At least that was my experience.

We had fewer and fewer of them until we eventually stopped having them at all. I think that's probably due to decreased attendance and decreased reviving that actually took place as a result of those revivals.

At my first church in Kansas, my preaching professor from seminary, Dr. Aubrey, would visit our church from time to time. And one of my church members was a seminary student currently in his class.

And he suggested, hey, let's ask Dr. Aubrey if he will come preach a revival at our church. And so I asked him. And I said to him, would you come preach a revival?

[ 5 : 33 ] And he said to me, you know, Mike, I'd be happy to preach for you and help in whatever ways I can. If you want me to preach revival, I would. But I don't think that revival is something that you can plan.

It is something God does. And often he does it when we don't expect it. That's what we see from scripture. That's what we see in church history. Needless to say, I didn't ask him to preach a revival at our church.

And his comment about revival stirred my curiosity. And in searching the scriptures, I realized he was right. Now, this doesn't mean that we shouldn't desire revival or pray for revival.

Psalms 85 conveys the attitude of these exiles who first returned from Babylon to Jerusalem in Ezra chapter 3.

In Psalm 85 verses 4 through 7, it expresses a heartfelt desire from them to God to restore the spiritual fervor of his people that had been diluted and polluted by their sin.

[ 6 : 45 ] Psalm 85 1, 4 through 7 says, So we should pray for revival.

So we should pray for revival.

But revival is not something that we can orchestrate. The psalmist acknowledges that it is God who brings revival.

And that is the basis of his plea. That's the basis of his prayer. The history of God's people recorded in the Bible from the first covenant to the new covenant is a record of various seasons of backsliding into sin and surprising times of spiritual revival.

And that's what we see about to happen in Ezra. If you remember, Ezra doesn't show up in this book until chapter 7, almost 60 years after the first group of Jewish exiles had returned from Babylon to rebuild the temple that had been destroyed in Jerusalem.

[ 8 : 07 ] When Ezra does enter the scene, he is introduced as a man skilled in the law of Moses that the Lord, the God of Israel had given. Ezra received God's word as truly being God's word.

He did not attempt to amend it, to change it, to dilute it, or to ignore it. Ezra 7, 10 says, For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of God and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

This description of Ezra as a man of God's word sets the stage for the revival that is about to take place. Remember, Ezra was commissioned by the Persian king, Artaxerxes, to teach the word of God to the people and to govern them according to its statutes, its commands.

With the king's blessing, Ezra gathered more of the Jews living in exile and encouraged them to return to Jerusalem with him. Before making that journey, they spent time collectively humbling themselves before God in prayer and fasting, seeking God's help to bring them safely to Jerusalem.

Chapter 8 ends with the people's reaction to God's answered prayer. Once they were safely in Jerusalem, they spent time worshiping God and expressing their humble gratitude for his provision as they prepared now to get to work in Jerusalem to accomplish his purpose for bringing them back to the promised land.

[ 9 : 57 ] Chapter 9 begins with Ezra learning about some bad things. He's appalled and grieved by a report that he hears and his response leads to revival.

And so the main idea for this morning's sermon is that an appropriate response to sin precedes revival. An appropriate response to sin precedes revival.

Ezra chapter 9 highlights three aspects of Ezra's response to sin, which leads to revival. Why does this matter? Why should we care?

Well, as a believer, you should care because aren't we constantly hearing reports about the decrease in our numbers? Attendance is down in the church across the board.

Baptisms are down. Giving is down. And we desire to see a change in these stats. We desire a turnaround. We want people to be saved.

[11:12] We want to see a movement of God in our churches. We want revival. We've prayed for revival. We are upset by the amount of sin we see in our culture and in our churches.

We're upset by the lack of influence Christians seem to have on culture, in our world. These things concern us. But do they grieve us?

Do we want to see a turnaround primarily so that living the Christian life is easier for us so that we'll have less things to fear?

Or do we want to see a turnaround because we fear God? Do we point the finger for our failures at everyone else and blame them for their sinfulness?

Or do we see the finger of God pointing back at us in his word, causing us to recognize our own sin, our own depravity, our own inability to measure up?

[12:22] How brokenhearted are we truly over what we see in the world? How brokenhearted are we truly over the sin that we see in ourselves?

Do we understand in humility that we are a part of the problem? That we have been too silent, too permissive, and too apathetic towards the sin we see around us and too blind to see the sin that resides within us.

If you want to see revival, you must first plead with God in prayer to revive you. If you're an unbeliever this morning, we're glad you're here and you need to hear this message because salvation is response, not to an altar call or an invitation to recite a prayer or being plunged under the waters in a baptistry.

Salvation is a response to the gospel when God opens your eyes to see your sin committed against him willfully in rebellion. when God opens your mind to understand the eternal consequences of your sin and opens your heart to grieve and to mourn over your rejection of him.

You have disobeyed God. You have incurred his wrath, his anger for denying and rejecting your good and holy creator. It's that knowledge that brings an overwhelming sense of grief.

[13:51] It's that knowledge that causes you to mourn over your sinful condition. It's that bad news that softens your heart for the seed of the gospel, the good news to take root and bring life and transformation in your life.

If your sin, if sin doesn't cause you to grieve and to mourn and to seek God for help, then friend, I'm concerned that you truly know Jesus savingly.

I hope that through his word, God will save you today and that you will experience the reviving power of the Holy Spirit of God to bring you from spiritual death to eternal life.

So again, Ezra 9 through 1 through 15, the whole chapter highlights three aspects of Ezra's response to sin, which leads to revival. The first aspect of his response we see in verses 1 through 2 and that's recognition.

Recognition. I want to read verses 1 through 2 again. After these things had been done, approximately four months after Ezra had arrived with the exiles in Jerusalem, the officials approached me and said, the people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites, for they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands.

[15:33] And in this faithlessness, the hand of the officials and the chief men has been foremost. Long before this event in Ezra, God forbade his people from intermarrying with the people listed in verse 1 of Ezra chapter 9.

In Exodus 34, 11 through 16, God explained the reason for this prohibition and he used very strong language as he conveyed the importance of their obeying this command.

Ezra 34, 11, or Exodus, excuse me, 34, 11 through 16 says, God speaking to his people, observe what I commanded you to this day.

Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst.

You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down for you shall worship no other God for the Lord whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited to eat of his sacrifice and you take up their daughters for your sons and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods.

[ 17 : 08 ] God repeats the same command in Deuteronomy 7, 3 through 4, you shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons for they would turn away your sons from following me to serve other gods.

Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you and he would destroy you quickly. God's primary concern wasn't racial but moral corruption.

God knows the tendency of our hearts. He knows our propensity to be drawn to things that please our eyes but poison our hearts and our minds.

God called his people to be a light to the Gentiles, a holy nation through which the promised seed of the woman, the Messiah, the snake crusher, the champion who would save us from sin's curse would come.

God understands his people better than they understand themselves. If they married people who did not share their beliefs, convictions, and values, they would gradually blend the truth of God with lies eventually exchanging the truth of God for a lie.

[ 18 : 28 ] this would lead them to worship and to devote themselves to things that are not God, turning their hearts away from him. There had to be a clear separation.

There had to be a distinction between those who are of God and those who are not of God.

Otherwise, the light of God and the revelation of truth would be greatly diminished in obedience to God brings a lot of hurt, a lot of pain, and a lot of torment to the people that God loves.

Blending in with the world was a problem that plagued the Jewish nation in the Old Testament. You see it just about everywhere in the Old Testament and the disastrous consequences of it.

It's why God kicked Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden. It's why God kicked the Jews out of the Promised Land and sent them into exile. This problem has continued to plague the church throughout its existence too.

We see it in just about every place in the New Testament as well. Revelation chapter 2 through 3 features seven letters written by the risen Jesus Christ to seven churches with warnings that if they don't stop mixing and blending godliness with worldliness, if they don't repent, he says that he will come and he will remove their lampstand from its place.

[ 20 : 06 ] They would cease to serve as his representatives. He would not tolerate their tolerance and acceptance of what the world loves.

I played baseball at a Christian university and our coach repeatedly told us when we wore our uniforms that we represented Jesus, we represented our college, and we represented him. He would not put up with any kind of behavior that reflected poorly on the message that the words across our chest represented.

And for the most part, he meant it. But there were some players that seemed to get away with a little bit more than other players based upon their ability to help us win games.

God doesn't care about your ability. if what you do in public or in private brings shame to his name.

[ 21 : 21 ] If you don't repent, you will be exposed and you'll be removed. We've tragically seen that in our churches recently, haven't we?

some big names, some trusted leaders in the church have had their lights removed.

Not their salvation, but their ministries. I have books written by these men in my office, men who inspired me, men who I wanted to be like, and I've sadly had to go through my shelves and remove their books from public display, thinking, praying, God, I don't want to be like these men.

help me, help us. Jesus has entrusted us with a hard job to serve as his representatives, to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, to make disciples, to take up the cross and to put sin to death as we pursue righteousness and holy lives in a world that constantly bombards us from every direction with temptations to do the opposite, desensitizing us to sin and its presence in our lives and its presence in our church.

This mission is hard, but because we cannot fulfill it without being in this world where we face all of these things. God has given us to fight for truth and to defend ourselves and our churches against lies disguised as the truth.

[ 23 : 32 ] John 17 records Jesus' prayer for his disciples both in the present time before his crucifixion and in the past time, I should say in our time, referring to us after his resurrection.

And this is what he prayed. I have given them your word and the world has hated them because they are not of the world just as I am not of the world. God has given us his word to recognize sin so that we can either resist it or confront it.

Now, there is something important for us to notice here in verses 1 through 2. Ezra is not the one who raised the issue.

I think we can safely presume that during those four months, Ezra was busy doing what God had moved Artaxerxes to commission him to do, preaching and teaching God's word, specifically the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, which contain the commands that we've already read this morning from Exodus and Deuteronomy.

What we need to notice here is that the sin of God's people was exposed by the light of God's word. So revival happens when people recognize sin through the proclamation of God's word.

[ 25 : 30 ] There is another really important thing for us to see in the Hebrew that is kind of obscured in our English translations of verse 2. These officials, these men had heard God's word preached and they recognized that there is a very serious sin that is being tolerated in their ranks amongst the people of God.

They recognized that this sin mixed the holy race with the people of the lands. Now, the Hebrew word translated as race in the ESV is Zerah and it appears in the Hebrew as a singular noun. A better translation would be holy seed, not seeds plural, seed singular. These men were making reference to the holy seed, the seed that God promised would come from the woman and would crush the serpent's head.

These men through God's word recognized that they and their people were in grave danger because they endangered God's promises and God's purpose so that they could cuddle up with sin so that they could lay with snakes like Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden Satan the serpent challenged God's word leading them to exchange the truth of God for a lie he promised them a better and more pleasing life by possessing what their eyes desired in disobedience to God but instead of giving them life their disobedience resulted in sin and death revival cannot happen unless God through his word opens our spiritual eyes to recognize sin and its horrific consequences so why was it these men and not the men who were committing these sins how comes this group could see it in these men who were actually doing the sin how comes they couldn't see it maybe the men engaged in this sin were ignorant of

God's word maybe they skipped out on the times when Ezra was teaching God's word or maybe they were present when he taught but they excused their behavior we don't know for sure but what we do know for sure is that by God's grace these men in verse one had their eyes opened to recognize a sin that was being tolerated and in their love and devotion to God they refused to excuse it if you truly want to see revival then you must know God's word and you must pray for the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to see to recognize how horrible sin is and you must ask God to make you feel the same horror when you are tempted by the things that lead you to stray from him by

[ 28 : 59 ] God's grace these men recognized the sin being tolerated by God's word they recognized its horrific consequences and they exposed this sin that was being hidden from Ezra so the first aspect of that response is to recognize the second now is a reaction the right reaction Ezra hears about this sin that is being tolerated amongst God people and look at how he responds to it look at how he reacts to it in verse three as soon as I heard this I tore my garments and my cloak I pulled hair from my head and my beard and I sat appalled now some of you might be thinking this reaction seems pretty extreme why Ezra react

Ezra react by harming himself tearing his clothes pulling out his hair why would he react by harming himself in that way he didn't commit these sins it was other people who committed these sins Ezra was so immersed in God's word and so familiar as a result with the history of God's dealings with his people when they strayed from him and when they did not repent so aware that it provoked a wrathful response within him which he inflicted upon himself R.W.

Dale said it is partly because sin does not provoke our own wrath that we do not believe that sin provokes the wrath of God if revival is going to happen we need to recognize sin and react in holy

fear of God's wrath towards it like Ezra again it's important to note that Ezra didn't react by placing himself above those who had disobeyed God by marrying women God commanded them not to he did not rip their clothes he did not tear out their hair instead he identified himself with the sins of his people and he reacted by taking out his wrath towards their sin upon himself Ezra's reaction to the sins committed by others against

God is a small picture of the great big picture that we see in the Bible in the big picture we are the ones who have sinned and Ezra is a type a foreshadowing of Jesus the son of God the holy seed who took the father's wrath upon himself on the cross we are the ones who have committed spiritual adultery adultery Jesus wasn't guilty but he took our sin he took our shame our punishment upon himself Romans 5 6 through 9 says for while we were still weak at the right time Christ died for the ungodly for one will scarcely die for a righteous person though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die but

God shows his love for us and that while we were still sinners Christ died for us since therefore we have now been justified by his blood much more shall we be saved from him from the wrath of God Jesus Christ the sinless eternal son of God identified with us becoming like us sinful men tore his clothes sinful men tore out his hair and sinful men nailed him to the cross 2 Corinthians 5 21 says for our sake he that's God the father made him God the son to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God God does not wink at our sin God hates sin but in love he sent his son

[ 33 : 56 ] Jesus to die in the place of sinners sinners on the cross taking upon the wrath of God on himself that by faith in him we are saved we are spared we receive we're credited with his sinless life don't take God's grace for granted and don't excuse sin's presence in your life and in the life of others Ezra didn't Ezra could have come up with excuses maybe there weren't enough Jewish women for the men to marry that could have been an excuse or maybe he could have used the excuse that you know what guys I am busy I am swamped someone else needs to go and deal with this matter

Ezra like Jesus even though he had committed no part in their sin identified himself with the sin of the people his people and he mourned!

over it that's the appropriate response is that how you respond to your sin in the sin that you see in others around you what would you think of a doctor who upon discovering that you have cancer gave you a hug and said well you know what it was nice knowing you what would you think if your house was on fire and the firefighters showed up and they said something like well we're just going to have to let it burn out what would you say to a policeman who saw an armed robbery taking place and said you know I'm off duty so just give them what they want and hopefully nobody gets hurt those are all inappropriate responses aren't they perhaps the reason we haven't experienced revival is because we don't react to our sin and the sins of others in the way that we should because we've excused it or we act like it's someone else's problem or react as if it's not a big deal Ezra's reaction however sparked a reaction in verses 3 through 5 says then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles him while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice 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 the people's reaction in verse 4 is to tremble before God because they know God and because they believe God's word they know that God keeps his word they know what God has said that he will do if his words are disregarded and so they tremble because they know

God and apart from God's word you cannot know him they join Ezra in his mourning in his grief like Ezra and like these people I ask you is that your reaction to sin or are you thinking that so some so some men married some women that they weren't supposed to they didn't really do anything that bad your response to Israel's sin your response to your sin reveals what you truly believe about God here's the good news Jesus said in Matthew 5 4 blessed are those who mourn!

[ 38 : 32 ] for they shall be comforted blessed are those who mourn over their sin they shall be comforted Ezra will eventually be comforted after he mourns over his people's sin his recognition and response along with the others who joined him would lead to revival but at this point in his grief he goes to God in prayer and rather than complaining about other people and their sin rather than excusing sin rather than complaining about God's judgment against sin Ezra acknowledges in his prayer that God would be right to give his people what their sins deserve as he recounts God's faithfulness to his adulterous people who continually time after time stray away from him and he

does that in verses 6 through 9 which brings us to the third response repentance repentance

Ezra does not minimize sin by coming up with excuses or calling it anything other than what it is it's rebellion against God he casts himself in the nation of Israel on God's undeserved mercy in verses 10 through 12 he laments over Israel's failure to respond to God's graciousness and goodness with obedience in verses 13 through 15 he says 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 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 oh

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 in other words God you are right and we are wrong God you are good and we are wretched God you are faithful and we've been faithless we don't deserve the grace you've given us to this point and frankly there's no reason that we have to even ask that you would continue to be gracious to us Lord we have no excuse that is what repentance is it is agreeing with

God about sin and its consequences and acknowledging that you can't stand before him feeling in any way worthy of his love and of his grace but God thank God he forgives those who humbly confess their sin to him who mourn over their sin and who acknowledge their inability to stand before him based upon any perceived goodness of their own second Peter 3 9 says the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promises as some count slowness but is patient towards you not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance so this is the appropriate response that precedes revival how should we react how should we adjust to what we've heard

I think it's simply this turn to Jesus for restoration turn to Jesus for restoration unbeliever you need to turn to Jesus so that you will be saved so that you will be restored to right relationship with God there is only one way to eternal life there is only one son of God who died on the cross to atone for the sins of others by identifying himself with them dying in our place rising again victorious over sin and death there is no other way for you to be saved than to turn to Jesus and seek him for salvation and that is what God is calling you to do today to turn to him to be saved by him to put your faith in him to have eternal life to no longer bear the guilt and the shame and the punishment that you will for your own sins salvation begins with a revival you acknowledging your sin and your need for a savior and you turning to

[ 44 : 34 ] Jesus and putting your faith in him and if you do that you will be saved for those of you who are Christians how do you turn to Jesus for restoration well I think it's it's simply this whatever you try to cover up whatever sin you're involved in whatever you try to cover up God's warning to you is this he'll uncover it at some point in time it will be exposed but whatever sin you uncover to him God will cover up you know what it is and I'm sure you have excuses for its presence in your life but understand from what we read this morning there is no excuse for the

God who sees all and the God who knows all and it is far better for you to uncover that sin that he will cover it up than to have him expose it and you potentially have to bear the earthly consequences for that and the ways that it will hurt you and the ways that it will hurt those who you love that's the invitation for you you can do that here this morning if you feel comfortable and you want to come during our time of invitation I encourage you to do that and anybody who would look down on you for that should be ashamed

Ezra chapter 9, but for now, I want you to see the response. And if you care about revival and if you want to see revival, this is how it happens. And it begins with you seeking a revival of your own and asking God's help to bring that about so that there will be a revival in our churches and in our nation that hopefully spreads to the world. Let's pray.

Lord, we're sinners, God. All of us have fallen short, way short of your perfect standard. And God, you would be right and you would be just if you left us in our sin and if you left us to bear the consequences both in this life and the life to come eternally for the sins that we've committed willfully against you. God, you would be right. And we'd have no good reason to say otherwise.

[ 47 : 55 ] But Lord, in your grace, you have provided the way for us to be forgiven, for us to be saved and have eternal life, for our sins to be covered and removed from us completely through your son, Jesus Christ, and his death on the cross, and his resurrection. Lord, we need revival.

God, we want to see it. But too often, Lord, forgive us that we aren't the one who thinks needs reviving.

Too often, we see others as the problem. Too often, Lord, instead of grieving and mourning over sin, we get angry and we think that it's our right to take out your vengeance upon it instead of coming before you humbly and just asking, Lord, for your help, pleading with you to forgive us. God, I pray that through your word this morning, Holy Spirit, that you've opened our eyes and our minds and our hearts to understand that if we really want to see revival, we need to pray for it in an earnest way like we've not prayed for it before.

Being brokenhearted over our sins, Lord, I pray that you would break our hearts, that you would cause us to mourn and to grieve, that, Lord, there would be a change, that there would be a reviving that you do and that you would receive all the glory for it.

[ 50 : 03 ] So, God, we pray for your help and we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.