Ezra Ch9v1-Ch10v44 - Right With God Through Repentance And Faith

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Preacher: Sam Ross

[0:00] Good morning, everybody. So, if your Bibles are open to Ezra chapter 9, we're going to cover two chapters today.

! We're not going to read every verse in the two chapters. I'm not going to read it all from the start either. We're just going to walk through the text together as we go. So, Ezra chapter 9, page 481.
A reminder of where we are in the story. A remnant of God's people have returned from exile in Babylon. Ezra chapters 1 to 6 tell us how the temple is restored.
And then chapters 7 to 10 tell us how God's people are restored. And in chapter 8, Jerusalem is filled with joy as sacrifices are made at the temple.
As Ezra, the priest and the teacher, begins to teach God's word again. But the joy is about to turn to anguish.
[1:03] And that's what we come across in chapter 9. So, let me just pray again briefly before we read this. Lord, as we open your perfect word, we thank you that you're speaking to us right now through it.

We believe that. We pray that you would, by your spirit, expose our sin and help us see Christ in his glory. Amen. Ezra chapter 9, verse 1.
After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites.
They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them.
And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness. Now, it could be easy to look at this and say, What's the big deal if around 100 or so Israelite men married women from other nations?
[2:27] Why is that a bad thing? Well, the key is the last word in the verse. Unfaithfulness. In fact, it's repeated five times in the next two chapters.

The issue here was not racial. It was spiritual. Here's how. When God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt and brought them into the Promised Land, he warned them with these words, as Ezra records, in verse 11.
Look down to verse 11. A little bit into the verse. It says this. God said, And now here was God's loving instruction.
Verse 12. Therefore, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them at any time, that you may be strong and eat the good things of the land, and leave it to your children as an everlasting inheritance.
You see, these peoples of other nations, they worshipped demonic powers disguised as idols, who required detestable practices, such as ritual prostitution, self-harm, child sacrifice.
[4:10] Out of love, God warned them, do not join yourselves to these people. They will lead you astray from me, your true husband.

They will lead you into those detestable practices of false gods. But the people wouldn't listen. And time after time, they allowed these people from the surrounding nations to live among them.
And as we see here, they even married them, practicing the same evil as they ran after those false gods.

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It's horrendous. They were unfaithful to the perfectly faithful God in heaven, who had rescued them and redeemed them.
Now, what about us? Christ has fulfilled the Old Testament law. There's no racial restriction on who we marry anymore.
[5:22] The New Testament simply calls believers not to marry unbelievers. But our unfaithfulness stretches so far beyond who we marry.

We are unfaithful to God every time we look to someone or something else for life or joy or comfort apart from God. It could be a career or a family or a person.
We are unfaithful to God every time we indulge in sin, whether that's gossip about a colleague or lying to get ahead or entertaining lustful thoughts about someone.
We are unfaithful to God every time we know the right thing to do from his word and we don't do it out of fear or laziness or desire for our own comfort.
God is perfectly faithful. We are treacherously unfaithful. All our sin and rebellion is just like us walking out on the God who has loved us perfectly and into the arms of false gods that we have set up.
[6:39] When someone commits adultery on a loving, caring spouse who has been faithful over many years, that is devastating. God uses that image to help us, I think, to grasp this is the nature of our unfaithfulness to God.

That is how shocking and incomprehensible it is that we would walk out on him in his love and the question looming large in front of us in this text is this.
How can a treacherously unfaithful people remain with a perfectly faithful God? How could we, the repeatedly adulterous wife, continue in relationship with this perfect husband?
it would seem impossible. And yet, the answer rings through the pages of Ezra 9 and 10 that through repentance and faith, we, the unfaithful, can remain with the perfectly faithful God.
Repentance and faith is not just how we begin the Christian life, it's how we live it every single day.
So we need to hear, what does it mean to truly repent?
[8:12] What does that look like? And then, what is that true faith that follows repentance? We're going to see it in this text.

We're going to first see three different stages of true repentance as we walk through the story. Now, the first step of true repentance is brokenheartedness at our sin.
Look with me at Ezra 9 and verse 3. And this is Ezra's reaction to hearing of the Israelite sin of marrying women from other nations.
Verse 3, when I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled.
Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered around me because of this unfaithfulness of the exiles. And I sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice.
[9:24] Skip forward to chapter 10 verse 1. While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites, men, women, and children gathered round him.

They too wept bitterly. Here's the first sign of true repentance. It's a broken heart at our own sin.
We all know the situation around the dinner table. The child wrongs their sibling in some way or another and shows no remorse for it.
Parent says to child, say sorry to your brother. But no apology is forthcoming. Parent gets a little tetchy, says, unless you say sorry, there won't be any dessert.
Child thinks about it for a second, weighs up the options, and then mutters sorry. We all know fake repentance of the lips when we see it, when we hear it.
[10:42] David said in Psalm 51, he said, you don't delight, Lord, in sacrifice or I'd bring it. You don't take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, oh God, is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

True repentance begins with a broken and contrite heart at our unfaithfulness, recognizing how hideous our sin is.
and we can't fake that. So we need to know what caused Ezra and the people of Israel around him to be truly grieved at their sin.
Here's the answer. What happened right before this chapter? God's word was taught for the first time in a very long time. And God's spirit convicted the people how they were totally out of line with

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God's word.
You see, God's word shows us his perfect standard. And then the spirit convicts us of how we've fallen short. And we need this desperately.
[12:07] We must have God's spirit expose our sin through God's word. So we cry out to him to do that convicting work. Whether we're hearing God's word in church on a Sunday morning or sitting down in our own personal time with the Lord with his word open or opening it up with a brother or sister during the week.

We need God's spirit to show us our sin. That we would be broken hearted at it. Repentance begins here.
But as we read on we also see that repentance involves full confession of that sin to God. Read on in Ezra's words from chapter 9 verse 5.
Then at the evening sacrifice I rose from myself abasement with my tunic and cloak torn and fell on my knees. With my hands spread out to the Lord my God and prayed.
I am too ashamed and disgraced my God to lift up my face to you because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens.
[13:28] From the days of our ancestors until now our guilt has been great. because of our sins we and our kings and our priests have been subjected to the sword and captivity to pillage and humiliation at the hands of foreign kings as it is today.

One thing to notice Ezra didn't marry any pagan wife but he's not so naive as to think that everyone else has the sin problem and not him.
He says our sins are higher than our heads. How easy it is to see the sin of others and ignore that in our own hearts.
In true confession we take ownership for our own sin. We confess it to God in full and also to his people walking alongside us.
We don't make excuses or point the finger at someone else. And as we see next we need to specifically name that sin. Read on in verse 8.
[14:50] But now for a brief moment the Lord our God has been gracious in leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place in his sanctuary.

And so our God gives light to our eyes and a little relief in our bondage. Though we are slaves, our God has not forsaken us in our bondage. He shown kindness in the sight of the kings of Persia.
He has granted us new life to rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins and he has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem.
But now our God what can we say after this? For we have forsaken the commands you gave through your servants the prophets.
Ezra goes on to name what that sin was intermarrying with other nations. Despite God's lavish grace and protection and kindness over them they've basically thrown it back in his face in this intermarriage.
[16:02] True confession is not offering a general catch-all Lord I'm sorry for my sins at the end of the day. It's naming those sins to the Lord day by day.

And it also involves recognizing the consequences of our sin. Read on from verse 13. Ezra says what has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and our great guilt and yet our God you have punished us less than our sins deserved and have given us a remnant like this.
Shall we then break your commands again and intermarry with the peoples who commit such detestable practices? Would you not be angry enough with us to destroy us leaving us no remnant or survivor?
Ezra knew being exiled to Babylon was the least of their worries. He recognized God had every right to destroy his people because of their horrendous unfaithfulness.
That is the deserved consequence of our rebellion. It's death. But even worse than that, our sin means that we must be separate from God forever.
[17:39] Look, I grew up on a farm. Some wet, dreary days in the depths of winter convinced me that I wasn't cut out for the farming business.

Scraping out cow muck from the stalls, slipping and sliding down a rain-soaked mountain, chasing after cows we were never going to catch anyway, losing your boot in a mud bath.
Now, my mom would keep a clean house. She would mop the floors every Saturday night. She would hoover. It was always looking great. Some days, you'd arrive back to the house filthy from

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head to toe and stinking of farm.
And I would stand there thinking at the back door, there's no way I can enter in this state. There's just no way.
Likewise, Ezra cries out in verse 15. See what he says, Lord, the God of Israel, you are righteous. We are left this day as a remnant.
[18:50] Here we are before you in our guilt, though because of it, not one of us can stand in your presence. True confession acknowledges that left to ourselves the filth of our sin separates us from the perfect holiness of God.

We can't stand in his presence with our guilt. repentance. But repentance involves more than just brokenheartedness at our sin and full confession of it.
sin. We're also going to see repentance means turning away from that sin. Bringing our lives back in line with God's word.
Look what happens next in the story. Chapter 10, verse 2. Then Shekaniah, son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, said to Ezra, we have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us.
But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel. Now, let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children in accordance with the counsel of my Lord and of those who fear the commands of our God.
[20:25] Let it be done according to the law. Shekaniah knew that their repentance was not genuine until they had practically done something about it, until they had actually turned away from their sin.

And to do that, they would have to send away these women with their detestable practices and idol worship.
And you can bet that was an excruciatingly hard thing to do. But for God's people at that time, that was what was required, which says to us, letting go of the sin that we cherish is going to hurt in the short term.
But we cannot afford to hold on to it. The question we all need to ask ourselves is, what sin have I failed to turn away from?
sin. It's not at all that we should expect to turn away from sin in our own strength just by trying harder or something like that.
[21:53] God has given us his spirit and other means to help us fight sin. Here's one such mean in verse 7, chapter 10, verse 7.

A proclamation was then issued throughout Judah and Jerusalem for all the exiles to assemble in Jerusalem. So if you read on you'll see how they dealt with the sin in community.
No keeping it private. They brought their sin out into the open and seeking accountability with each other and seeking to do everything in accordance with what God said, their sin was dealt with effectively and swiftly.
Now maybe that frightens you a bit. It does me, I'm not going to lie. We tend to treat sin as a really private thing, just between me and God.
We think, oh, I'd be too ashamed if they knew that I struggled with that. So we can tend to turn up at church as if everything's fine and we struggle on on our own.
[23:21] That's not what God intends the church to be. this is not a museum for perfected saints where we all put our perfect lives on display on a Sunday.

No, church is more like a rehabilitation facility for sinners where real mercy flows from God through us to one another.
where we can confess our sin openly and find accountability in one another.
Brothers and sisters who will pray for us and walk with us and help us to turn away from that sin.
That is God's design for us, that we would help each other to maturity in Christ.
So we need to ask ourselves, is there someone in the body of Christ here that I am open with about my sin?
[24:36] Is there someone who's praying for me with the sin I'm struggling with right now?
accountability is God's gift to us to help us turn away from sin.

So true repentance, we've learned it's three things, it's broken heartedness at our sin, it's confessing it in full, and it's turning away from it.

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now our question at the start was how can a treacherously unfaithful people remain with a faithful God?
And we see in this text that actually repentance alone, just saying sorry for our sin and meaning it, and turning away from it, that actually isn't enough. In chapter 10 and verse 14, the Israelites know that the fierce anger of their God needs to be turned away from them.
And God is right to be filled with this holy jealous anger at our unfaithfulness. We have defied his perfect character, we have disrupted our relationship with him, we have defaced ourselves as his image bearers.
[26:06] We can't just say sorry and he just overlook it. God must punish sin if he is to be just. And the people realized the just punishment of sin was death and separation from God.

And this is where faith comes in. The people had faith that God would show mercy to them on the basis of a sacrifice being made.
Look with me. Chapter 10 verse 19. It says, they all gave their hands in pledge to put away their wives and for their guilt they each presented a ram from the flock as a guilt offering.
They had faith that God would show mercy on the basis of the blood of this animal being poured out.
On the basis of this sacrifice being made. Now, Hebrews 9.22 says this, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.
[27:29] I want you please to turn to Hebrews chapter 10 as we think about this and as we finish today. Hebrews chapter 10.

It's on page 1208. in the Old Testament law, God had graciously made a way for the Israelites to be forgiven of their sin by presenting an innocent animal for sacrifice.
Now, the question was, could the blood of that animal ever really atone for the people's sins? Well, the writer of Hebrews gives us the answer. Read from verse 1.
He says, the law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the realities themselves. For this reason, it can never, by the same sacrifices, repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.
Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins.
[29:04] But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said, sacrifice an offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me.
With burnt offerings and sin offerings, you are not pleased. then I said, here I am. It is written about me in the scroll. I have come to do your will, my God.
You see, the sacrifice that the people made in Ezra's time for the guilt of their sin, and all the sacrifices made over about 1,500 years, every one of them was merely showing the people that blood was necessary to make atonement for their sin.
But it wasn't the blood of the animals that would really pay for their sin. it was pointing forward to the sacrifice that would pay for sin.
[30:34] The people needed not an animal. They needed someone who would do God's will perfectly. And that is Christ, who we just read about.

His body was prepared as a sacrifice for us, the perfect sacrifice. Look at verse 10 in Hebrews chapter 10.
It says, and by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all.
Do you remember that earlier picture of the filth of our sin and unfaithfulness, meaning we can't enter God's presence? Through faith in Christ's sacrifice, for us, we can be made holy.
That is the astonishing news for you and I. We can have faith that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all our sin.
[31:43] It is as if we are given new, clean clothes to wear. the righteousness of Jesus so we can stand in God's presence forever, made right with him.

When John the Baptist first saw Jesus, he said these words, behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

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see the Lamb hanging on the cross for your unfaithfulness. See him drink the cup of God's wrath at your sin and treachery.
He bore God's wrath for you. He paid for all of your sin. We are made right with God the Father through repentance and faith in Christ whose blood atones for our sin.
Friend here today who has not yet trusted in Christ, repent of your sin. Put your faith wholly in him. [33:09] The song we sang earlier said it. This is how we come. Just as I am without one plea but that your blood was shed for me and that you bid me come to thee O Lamb of God I come.

Jesus bids you come. And not just on the first day of your life with him. Jesus bids us come every day in repentance and faith because every day we fail to love him as we should.
We are unfaithful people still. Through repentance and faith we can live in the forgiveness he's purchased on the cross.
when you think of our sister Helen how she lived in that forgiveness she had total confidence that her sin was atoned for that God's anger against her sin was turned away in Christ God I was with her over the summer one day and she looked me in the eye and said Sam I don't fear death her full faith was in Jesus and right now that faith has given way to sight she sees her savior right now in his presence she is perfectly happy there she trusted she believed and she found him to be true to his word may we also know the overwhelming joy of the life of repentance and faith in
Christ whose blood atones for every sin let's pray all like they will they will they will all they will they will all they will all they will all they will all they will they will all they will all they will all they will all they will all they will all they will what they will fathers fathers all they all they will fathers fathers fathers really fathers fathers fathers step fathers fathers fathers fathers fathers fathers fathers fathers pare fathers fathers

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