

God Awakens Our Hearts: From Sin to Salvation | Ezra 9-10

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Date: 27 October 2024

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[0 : 00] Welcome to Ontario Community Church, where we're dedicated to encouraging, equipping, and engaging lives for Christ. Located in Ontario, Oregon, Pastor Patrick Daly preaches insightful sermons from the Word of God, offering practical applications for modern living.

We're delighted to share this sermon with you. All right. Well, good morning, everyone. It's great to be here with you as today we are finishing our sermon series through the book of Ezra.

Can you believe that? It's been 15 weeks that we have been going through the depths, the truth, the wisdom, the things we can observe, the things that we can learn, and the things that we can apply to our very lives in this wonderful book of Ezra.

We have gone over so many different things. The main idea of Ezra being that the Holy Spirit moved the heart of kings and the people of God.

Ezra is about the return of the people of God from exile from Babylonia to Jerusalem. There was the rebuilding of the temple.

[1 : 07] There was the rebuilding of the altar, the adversaries that try to stop the process, the progress that was being made from the people of God. Then there was the prophet speaking.

You had Haggai and Zachariah who were prophesizing that, hey, you've got to keep the progress going. There was the completion of the temple. Last week when we were in chapter 8, we were talking about how there was the search for the Levites.

There was the finding, there was the call, the invitation, 38 Levites responded along with 220 servants. It was a wonderful thing that was happening.

There was the prayer and the fasting for protection, and the traveling of the vessels. Last week we went over how vessels are a representation, just like how there's sheep.

That we as the people of God, as the church, as the local body, we are to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and that we are to be transported when we believe in Jesus Christ, his death, his burial, and his resurrection.

[2 : 16] We are transported spiritually speaking from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of light, and that we go on this journey together in Christ.

That leads us to today, where we are finishing off with, if you go to page 465 in your ESV Pew Bible. There's a lot that's going on here.

There was the return of the vessels and the Levites, all of these people that were traveling and returning. Here is where we're going to see that Ezra is going to pray a prayer of repentance.

Then in chapter 10, the people responding, they are going to repent as well. It's a wonderful ending for this wonderful book. Before we go any further, let's pray together.

Dear Lord and Heavenly Father, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, we are grateful that we are here today, here in this place.

[3 : 16] We know that you are with us. And Father, we ask that truth is spoken here, that lives are transformed, that there are things that we observe, things that we learn and things that we can apply.

And we ask that the Holy Spirit will stir our hearts to know you, to grow in you, and to do good in your holy name. May we learn from these final chapters, and may we go out and do the work of ministry that you have set before us.

It is in the name of Jesus that we pray. And we all say together, amen. Amen. So we're going to be in Ezra chapter nine here. So the first two verses here, this is the sin of intermarriage.

Now, when we hear that, we might get a little, what is that? What in the world is going on here? So I want to read these first two. And after these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, the people of Israel and the priests and the Levites had not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations.

It goes on in verse two. They have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons. Key point here. So that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands.

[4 : 32] And in this faithlessness, the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost. So those first two verses, this is what is known as the sin of intermarriage. And when we're hearing this, what in the world is that?

It has to do with the lineage. It has to do with the bloodline. Because God had a promise, the promise of the inheritance of Jesus Christ.

I want you to turn really quick so that you can see what I mean. Go to verse 12 in Ezra here. Let's go to verse 12 of chapter nine really quick.

Don't give your daughters, right? Don't intermarry so that you may be strong and eat the good of the land and leave for it a what? An inheritance for your children.

And that is the key thing that helps us with our understanding of what intermarriage is. It is the mixing of the bloodline, right? The mixing of the royal race, so to speak, the holy race.

[5 : 35] We know that Jesus Christ is going to come from the lineage and he is going to be born, right? So here in this moment we're seeing, well, you're tampering with what God has set in motion.

And so by you marrying other people that's outside of the bloodline, well, that's going against what God had in store for the people of God.

And I wanna make this very clear just from the get go. This is not saying we can marry essentially whoever we want, but we certainly have to be mindful of who they are as people.

What are their morals, right? Are they a Christian? Those kind of things. You can easily see how this verse can be taken in a very, it can go in many different ways, but we're talking specifically for the holy race to allow for the inheritance, right?

Because think about this. Ephesians chapter one, verses 11 through four, in him, in Christ, we have received the inheritance. Does that make sense?

[6 : 43] Do you all understand what I'm saying? That the reason why you're seeing this intermarriage thing happening is to allow for Christ to be born through the lineage.

So that Christ can be born. Christ can be born in the manger, right? You have the royal lineage.

And so that salvation can come through him.

That's very powerful. You might not see it when you first read that, but that's what is going on here.

And so they have to, and you also see in Deuteronomy 7, three through four, you shall not intermarry.

There's another reason, and it's that when you're marrying people from foreign lands, very often in Deuteronomy and in Ezra, they can turn the children away from the Lord to serve other gods.

That was the other warning, right? That there's this risk that can happen where they might influence you in a negative way. So that's the warning that we see here. We then go into verses three to five, and this is where the prophet Ezra is tearing his cloak.

[7 : 50] And we see this often in scripture. Verse three, as soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak, and I pulled, now this is some graphic imagery, right?

I pulled hair from my head. Well, we do that sometimes when we're frustrated, right? But the specific language where it says, this for those of you who have a beard, right?

I pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled, right? It's the seriousness, it's the grieving, right? It's that Ezra, the prophet here is saying, look, there's a sense of repentance, because the tearing of the cloak, it represents what breaks one's heart, sorrow and grief.

So in this, verse four, right? You have people who are gathering around, verse five, at the evening sacrifice I arose for my fasting, he goes on to pray, right?

Verses six through 15, this is very similar to the many prayers of repentance. This is Ezra praying for the people of God. Oh my God, I am ashamed and blushed to lift my face to you.

[8 : 58] My God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads. And our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. Doesn't that sound like sin anyways, right? That our sin can seem overwhelming.

That's why we have Christ though. From the days of our fathers to this day, we have been in great guilt. So he's talking about we are guilty just like our fathers. If you remember, in the beginning of

Ezra, right before there was the spirit of Cyrus who was issuing a decree that the people of God would return from Babylonia to Jerusalem, the whole reason why they were exiled was because of disobedience to the Lord.

And yet in that, there was the moving of the spirit, the stirring of hearts of kings, right? The return of the vessels and the people of God. God had been good to them and they were still sinning.

That's what Ezra's talking about here. We're guilty like our fathers. You then go further on. But now in verse eight, now for a brief moment, favor has been shown by the Lord our God to leave us a remnant and secure hold within this holy place that our God might brighten our eyes.

And I love what Ezra's saying. Grant us a little what? A little reviving, right? Just, you know, the whole thing that happened in Ezra with the rebuilding of the temple was a little reviving, right?

[10:19] But God was being good to the people of God. You have given us revival, right? And it's basically saying you have been good to us when we don't deserve it, right?

It's showing the love. It reminds me of how God is good to us that Christ gave us Jesus, or that God gave us Jesus Christ despite the fact that we are sinners. There's a parallel that we can see there. Verse nine, we are slaves. Our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extend to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia and grant us some reviving to set up the house of God to repair its ruins.

It goes on in verse 10. We have forsaken your commandments, right? It goes verse 12, right? Don't, they're recognizing the wrong that they have done. And after all of this, right, it's they are, he is confessing to God, the sin of intermarriage, the wrong that the people had done.

This then leads us into chapter 10 then. If you go to chapter 10, while Ezra prayed and made a confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women and children gathered to him out of Israel.

[11:33] And for the people, they wept bitterly. They recognized what was going on. They recognized that Ezra was confessing, that he was praying, that he was grieving.

So here's another powerful thing that's happening, right? It then goes into, so they're recognizing what's going on, verses two through five. You see here, we have broken faith with our God and we have married foreign women from the people of the land.

But even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. Therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children according to the counsel of my Lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God.

Isn't that rededication? They're recognizing the wrong that they have done and they're saying, you know what? We wanna come back to the Lord.

We're recognizing what's been going on and we are ready to make a covenant with our God. Arise at verse four, it is your task and then we are with you, be strong and do it.

[12:33] So what's happening here is that in verses six, you see that Ezra is calling for the assembly to gather, right, it says here, Ezra withdrew before the house of God went to the chamber.

Verse seven, a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem. If anyone didn't come in three days, well, there's a consequence for that.

Then verses nine, all of the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within the three days. It goes on in verse 10, Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, you have broken faith and married foreign women and so increase the guilt of Israel.

Now make the confession to the Lord, to the God your fathers and do his will. It is the separation from sin, the wrong that they had done. And then in verse 12 through 17, this is where it's saying, it is so we must do as you have said, the people are many and the time is of great heavy rain.

We cannot stand in the open. Let our, verse 14, let our officials stand for the whole assembly. Let all the cities who have taken foreign wives come at a point in times, basically saying there's so many people who are sinning, there's gonna be a long line here.

[13:46] It's gonna take some time here. That's basically what's happening here. And then verse 15, this is an interesting one. Only Jonathan, the son of Aschile, right?

It's saying he opposed this. There's only a couple of people that actually opposed this declaration by Ezra. And then we go into verse 16, then the returned exiles did so, Ezra the priest selected men's heads of father's houses, according to their father's houses.

Verse 17, the first day of the first month, they had all come to an end of the men who had married foreign women. Then we have the last verses 18 through 44, where we have yet another list here. Verse 18, there were some, now there were found some of the sons of the priests who had married foreign women. And it gives a list here. Verse 19, they pledged themselves to put away their wives and guilt offering was made.

And then verse 44, all these had married foreign women, some of them even bore children. So it's talking about once again, the mixing with the holy race.

[14:56] And that is chapter nine and chapter 10 here. And it makes us think then for a moment, well, what can we learn from these?

The first thing that we can learn here is that the people of God, they were called to separate themselves from sin. As I mentioned, it was to allow for the lineage to happen so that Jesus Christ would be born.

And so that we here today can receive in the inheritance that is from Christ. So we receive the inheritance that was set long ago in Christ.

And the only other time we see something about marriage in this type of context has to do with who we associate with and who we marry. If you're marrying a believer, you have some people who are very big on saying, don't marry non-believers.

And when we're talking about 2nd Corinthians 6:14 through 17, that's the famous verse that talks about not being unequally yoked. And so that's another time where you'll see it, but it's not as heavy as what once was in Ezra.

[16:02] The second thing then is that we can learn is that Ezra prayed to God and he used his leadership to stand for righteousness. And so Ezra, if you picture the scene, the vessels and the Levites and the servants are coming, and Ezra is there and people are coming to him and saying that the people have not changed their ways.

They have not separated themselves from sin. He is using himself as a leader to pray before the Lord, praying to God and asking for forgiveness on behalf of the people of God.

Now previously you've heard me talk about how important it is for us to pray for our leaders, to pray for politicians. I know we're on the eve, we're getting very close to an election and we pray for the Spirit of God to work in whatever administration comes in, because I believe, just as we've seen in Ezra, that the Spirit of God can work in our leaders, amen.

So that's a very powerful thing. And in the same way, if you are a leader and you are a Christian, you are a godly man or a woman, you should pray over the people who you lead, who you minister to, or if you're running a corporation, your employees, if you're working at a nonprofit, you're a volunteer, if you're a teacher, you're students.

So it's this mutual thing when we're talking about the power of prayer, pray for those that you oversee. I know that's very military language, but it's also even in the church, something that I as a pastor am called to do is to pray for the congregation.

[17:43] And you see that in leadership, and that's what Ezra did. He used his leadership and he stood up for righteousness. He took his platform and he used his power to speak to the people of God saying, you need to repent.

And now I understand that may not always be possible nowadays, but we can still appreciate what had been done in that time period. The third thing then is that God's goodness remains even during sin.

In Romans chapter five, verse eight, it reminds us that while we were sinners, Christ died for us. Isn't that incredible? We think about with Ezra how God was still working through the people of God, through leaders, revival was happening despite them being sinners.

We have to think about us that despite all of the sin that we have done in the eyes of God, Christ still died for our sins. It's a wonderful connection that we can see from a historical and a biblical account.

[18:56] So despite the people's sins, God's mercy allowed, he gave the people the opportunity to repent. And he gave them this chance to realign.

I mean, isn't that powerful where the people of God are saying we're going to rededicate ourselves to the Lord? I mean, I can't think of how many people there were, but thinking of gathering of people coming together, we're going to realign ourselves with the living God is absolutely powerful.

I'm reminded of Psalm 103, which mentions that the Lord is merciful and gracious. He is slow to anger, right?

You had, I also think of the prayer that David prayed in Psalm 51, creating me a clean heart, oh God, and renew a right spirit within me.

I know there's different variations of that. You might be, that's a different translation, but you get the idea here. And so God is good to us, even despite the fact that we are sinners.

[20 : 04] He extends an invitation for us to believe in him through faith. There's God's grace, mercy, faithfulness, forgiveness. Our God is good.

And then also the other thing we can learn is that the people of God responded to unity, in unity. The community together repented together.

They heard the message of Ezra, and they were showing the sense of accountability. And you know what this reminds me of? What I gave a message series about Jonah, right?

You had Jonah the prophet who resisted God and he got eaten by the big fish, right? Well, he finally goes and he proclaims that the city of Nineveh needs to repent and the people respond.

And just like in Jonah, the people are responding, recognizing their sin, and it's much like what we're seeing here, Ezra the prophet is seeing the magnitude of the sin that's happening and saying, you guys have got to repent.

[21 : 12] You've got to have a changing of the mind, right? You've got to turn from your sin. You've heard me mention many times before, and I'll mention it again, repentance, the changing of the mind, right?

It is the turning, right? The changing the trajectory of our lives and to think of that as the people together, restoration and accountability.

How wonderful is that we're ready to rededicate our lives to God. We're ready to follow the Lord wherever he will lead. And so the difference with Jonah and Ezra is that one was talking about impending judgment.

If you don't change, there's gonna be judgment. In Ezra, it's look at the good that God has done for us. And it makes me think of nowadays how when we think of evangelism and sharing in the word of God or we're thinking of repentance, many of us may come to the Lord in bad times.

How many of us come to the Lord in good times? It's just as important that people come to the Lord in good times. And I think very often we forget how many blessings we have here in America.

[22 : 34] Will you come to the Lord even when you have a lot of good compared to other cultures, other countries? And so in all of this, this then comes to the question then, well, what do I do about this?

All right, you're talking about pastor that Ezra prayed a prayer of repentance and the people of God responded. You talked about the sin of intermarriage and how there's the need of separation of sin. Well, how can I apply this to my own life? What can I specifically do in my own walk with the Lord? This is why it's so important for us to observe the text, what's going on, to interpret and learn the lessons.

And then finally, what is the application? What can we do about that? And the first thing is to respond to God's call for salvation through belief in Jesus Christ.

Because you see, God was good to the people of God and in Ezra. And God is good to us by sending his son Jesus Christ, who changed the course of history, offering the free gift of salvation through belief.

[23 : 43] And what we must do as people, if we don't believe in the Lord, let this be a call for you to respond to salvation through faith, believing in the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It is acknowledging that we believe in the Lord. We believe in who Jesus Christ is. Have you responded to that?

And if you haven't, you definitely should do it. In John chapter 6, verse 29, the work of God is this, to believe in the one that he has sent, which is referencing Jesus Christ.

The second thing then is to put away sin, the former life, and to put on the new self. Ephesians chapter 4, verses 22 through 24, is to put off your old self, to be renewed in the spirit.

Be renewed in the spirit and to put on the new self created to be like God. Do you realize that God is holy, that God is good, that God is just and righteous?

[24 : 52] Think of the opposite of that. Unrighteousness, right? Evil, darkness. I don't know about you, but I don't want to be in darkness. I don't want to live a life that's a lie.

I want to live in the truth. I want to live in the light. And so when we think about becoming a Christian, just as I mentioned the imagery of vessels being transferred from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of light, we are called to become more like the Lord.

It's a constant thing, right? We are saved by grace through faith, and we become more sanctified. We become more holy. We are to be on a journey to be more like the Lord. Whenever I see this language, maybe you might agree, maybe you might not identify.

When I think of putting on and putting off your old self, I always think of it's like you're putting on new clothing as it were, right? You have a new identity that exists in Christ.

When we're thinking about putting on the new self, exhibiting compassion, love, the grace of God, exhibiting patience, I mean, when we went through clonings, we talked about what the new self looks like and how powerful that is.

[26 : 07] Look, all of these things, doesn't the world need transformation? Doesn't the world need the love of God?

Doesn't the world need so much of this to be renewed in the spirit? That's wonderful. Let's forget about former life. Let's put it aside. I don't want to think about where I was, except the fact of this is where God changed me.

This is where God moved in my life. But you let it go. You move on and you move forward in the Lord. And the third thing, then, is to follow God's specific call for your life.

God calls us into salvation, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, to be on a path of growing in the Lord.

The Lord wants us to have a relationship with Him, and God certainly calls for each and every one of us for a certain calling.

If you don't know God's calling for your life, that's OK. See to it that you ask the Lord. You pray to the Lord. And sometimes I found very often, your brothers and sisters in Christ will acknowledge a lot of things.

[27 : 23] They'll acknowledge. They'll affirm God's calling for your life. So where is God moving in your life? Is God calling you to take a specific position, or to take a certain class, or maybe not take a specific class?

Maybe God wants you to start having conversations with a family member or a friend that you haven't talked to in a while.

There's many things that God can call for us specifically. And I put up Ephesians here. Now, many of you know Ephesians chapter 2, verses 8 through 9, for by grace you have been saved.

It is not by works, lest any man boast. We know that verse. A lot of us forget the following verse.

And I've always come to appreciate it, that because we believe in the Lord and we're saved by grace through faith, it's not by works.

We are His workmanship. That we are created in Christ for good works. We're not saved by good works.

[28 : 31] We are created for good works. Salvation comes first. Works come after the fact. In which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

And so God's plan and intention is for us to be saved. And God calls us for our specific calling. And the next thing then is to step up and call for others to respond to God's call.

And I think of Matthew chapter 5, verse 14 through 16. Doesn't it remind you of the song, This Little Light of Mine? I'm going to let it shine.

This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine. Many of you may know that verse in the song. Hide it under a bushel.

No, right? Ah, you guys did it, right? I'm going to let it shine. Hide it under a bushel. No, I'm going to let it shine. It's kind of hard speaking it without singing it, right? But in that, it's a great reminder of a biblical truth that we are to let our light, the light of Christ, shine before others.

[29 : 37] Not to hide it under a bushel, right? Not to hide the light, but to let it shine for that others could see. And so there's a call for us as we are Christian, as we grow in the faith to share our faith in Christ with other people.

That certainly can look like having a conversation with others, but also how equally important is it for us to walk the walk, right? We talk the talk and we also walk the walk.

Because if we're not exhibiting love and patience in our everyday lives, some people might say, hey, are you really a Christian, right? It happens all the time.

And so call for others. What does that look like for you specifically? Does it look like having more conversations?

Does it look like living it out better? That's between you and the Lord. But certainly there is a call. And don't let your light.

[30 : 42] Let it shine. Don't hide it under a bushel. But let it shine. And the fifth thing, finally, is that we pray for revival in this land and to move hearts.

And this is the powerful thing that we learn in Ezra. There was a moving of the Holy Spirit. Just as Ezra was saying, I think Ezra was being serious when he said there was a little reviving.

But I think it's kind of a fun play on words, right? If that's a little reviving, what does a big reviving look like? What does it look like for the Holy Spirit to move in the hearts of our friends, our families? What does it look like for revival? Ezra teaches us how the Holy Spirit can move in the hearts of the people of God through pagan kings and through sinners.

And that is remarkable, and that should encourage us to pray to God. That revival will happen. That there will be a stirring, a moving of our hearts, but also those who are yet to believe in Jesus Christ.

[32 : 02] For the vessels that are still in darkness. For the ones that are like the lost sheep, so to speak. The ones that are yet to follow the great shepherd in Jesus Christ.

We've got to pray that there will be change in this city. Right? In the same way that I've said, we've got to pray for this election that the Holy Spirit will move in the heart.

And whoever wins, I'm more concerned about the Holy Spirit moving in the next administration, regardless of who it is. I'm more concerned about that.

I'm certainly concerned that we've got to pray that the Holy Spirit will move in our community, in our leaders within the community. And look, the fact that we are a border town, we have Oregon and we have Idaho, very different states.

We've got to pray for both sides. That's a responsibility for us. We've got to pray that we balance the grace and the love of Jesus Christ and the truth of God's word.

[33 : 09] And that the Holy Spirit will move for repentance, for change, for the coming to know who Jesus Christ is. And that that same spirit that is moved in what we find in Ezra, we also find in throughout scripture.

We know that our God is living inactive, much like the Word of God is living inactive. And we know that transformation comes from our Lord.

And that is why I am a Christian. It's because there is salvation in him. There's new life that's in him. There's renewal and restoration and transformation that comes from the Lord.

And I encourage all of you as we conclude this sermon series, as we finish off this Ezra series that we ask God, that we pray that God will awaken our hearts, that the Holy Spirit will move in our lives, in this area, in this land.

Let's pray for healing. Let's pray for revival. Let's pray for people to come to the Lord, to leave the former self. Leave it behind the hatred, the sin, the nastiness.

[34 : 28] And come to the Lord and put on that new self. Let's pray together. Dear Lord and Heavenly Father, we thank you for this time together, as we have just concluded this wonderful book of Ezra.

But just as we conclude one book that doesn't mean that we are to stop growing in you, we pray, Father, that truth, the truth that was spoken here, may stir our minds and our hearts and our spirits. We pray for transformation in our lives, but also that your love will flow out. You have poured your love into us. You've poured your Holy Spirit into us.

We ask that we can pour it out to others. And as we sing this last song, Because He Lives, I Can Face Tomorrow, may we be reminded of the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that because He lives, yes, we can face tomorrow, that you are with us, that you will not abandon us, you will not forsake it, you will not forsake us, and that you are the same yesterday, today, and forever.

And so we pray, Father, for a little reviving in our lives, in our friends, our family, our church, our community, and in our nation.

[35 : 59] We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. We pray together. Amen. Amen. Thank you for tuning in to the Ontario Community Church sermon podcast. For more about our church and how

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May God's blessings be with you.