

Renewal Culminates in Repentance

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[0 : 00] and countering in Ezra chapter 10 what is truly an uncomfortable series of events. And I think that's a good thing because what it's going to do is it is going to challenge my understanding, challenge your understanding of what it means for God to renew us, what it means for God to renew our church.

Now we've been seeing God at work over the last nine weeks as we've been studying the book of Ezra together. We've been seeing God renew his people. Now the people of Israel, if you recall, they had in their past turned away from him.

They had, among many other things, they'd been intermarrying with the other nations around them, which would have been fine except that the Lord forbid it because what happened was that these, nations led the people of Israel into the worship of their local cultural idols.

They led them away from the Lord, led them into practices such as cult prostitution, practices such as child sacrifice, many other awful things that were an abomination to the God of Israel, something God absolutely hated.

And so God sent his people, he sent the people of Israel into exile in the land of Babylon for 70 years. And in the book of Ezra, God has brought them back after all of this to the promised land where they have rebuilt his temple, where they are experiencing new life in God's presence.

[1 : 38] And God has brought them a leader and a teacher, a man named Ezra, who is a priest, who is going to teach them the proper way that people in God's kingdom should be living, how they can follow his commandments as God's people.

But last week in chapter 9, once Ezra arrives in the land of Israel, once he arrives in the city of Jerusalem, he uncovers a very serious problem among God's people.

And what's going on is that some of the Israelites are once again intermarrying with other people groups who worship other gods.

Now, Jonathan went into a lot more detail about this in his sermon last week, about the problems with this, the rationale for why God had forbidden it. Last week we learned how prior to exile, this had all led to the corruption of the community through this evil behavior.

And so Ezra recognized the threat that this pattern of behavior posed to God's people. And Ezra recognized that they were sinning against God. And what that means is they were rebelling against his authority.

[2 : 47] The word sin is a word that is not often used in our culture. It seems to be used primarily in a religious context. And that's unfortunate. The reason that sin is not often used in our culture is sin implies something.

Sin implies that you have a relationship with God and a responsibility to God. Ultimately, we were all created, whether you believe in Jesus Christ, whether you believe in the Lord God or not, we were all created in God's image.

We were all created to represent him to the world. And so we have a fundamental relationship with God. We have a fundamental dignity that comes from our connection with God, from our relationship with God.

But with that comes a fundamental responsibility to represent God accurately, to show what his character is like. And what sin is is basically saying, God is, when I lie, God is a liar.

It's communicating an untruth about God. And sin is rebelling against God's law. It is fundamentally misrepresenting God to the world. And it is a breach.

[3 : 58] It is an unfaithfulness to the Lord God who made us. That's what sin is. And Ezra recognized that God's people were sinning against him.

They were rebelling against his authority. And they were acting unfaithfully toward him in their special, unique relationship with the Lord God. Chapter 9, we saw Ezra praying a prayer of confession on his knees, weeping before the Lord, because he recognized the severity of the problem of sin among the people of God.

And so this brings us to Ezra chapter 10. Now, I'm going to read this chapter. It does end with a long list of guilty individuals at the end. Somehow, I've been the one who's ended up with all the Hebrew names.

I don't think that happened on purpose, but who knows, you know. Well, we're going to tackle that one again.

If you don't have a copy of the scripture with you, either a paper copy or on your smartphone or something like that, please raise your hand and Usher will be happy to provide you with one.

[5 : 04] We're going to be spending a lot of time in this passage, reading it and then commenting on it. If you have a paper copy, the book of Ezra is about a third of the way through your Bible. And we're going to be in chapter 10, the very last chapter in the book.

Now, as I'm reading this, here's the question I want you to have in your mind. What are you feeling? Picture in your mind these events taking place, because these are real historical events.

Picture them taking place to real people. And I want you to ask yourself, do these events make you happy? Do they make you sad? Angry? Encouraged?

Uncomfortable? What's your emotional state as you're considering these? Well, let's read to find out. Ezra chapter 10. While Ezra prayed and made 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, for the people wept bitterly.

And Shekariah, the son of Jehiel, the sons of Elam, addressed Ezra, we have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land.

[6 : 17] 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, and let it be done according to the law.

Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you. Be strong and do it. Then Ezra arose and made the leading priests and Levites and all Israel take oath that they would do as had been said.

So they took the oath. Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the chamber of Jehoanah, the son of Eliashib, where he spent the night neither eating bread nor drinking water, for he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles.

And a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem. And that if anyone did not come within three days, by order of the officials and the elders, all his property should be forfeited and he himself banned from the congregation of the exiles.

Imagine if that were the threat if you didn't go to an election. We get 100% voter turnout every time. Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within the three days.

[7 : 32] It was the ninth month on the twentieth day of the month. And all the people sat in the open square before the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of the heavy rain.

I think we can relate to that one. And Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, You have broken faith and married foreign women and so increased the guilt of Israel.

Now then, make confession to the Lord, the God of your fathers, and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives. Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, It is so.

We must do as you have said. But the people are many, and it is a time of heavy rain. We cannot stand in the open. Nor is this a task for one day or for two, for we have greatly transgressed in this matter.

Let our officials stand for the whole assembly. Let all in our cities who have taken foreign wives come at appointed times, and with them the elders and judges of every city, until the fierce wrath of our God over this matter is turned away from us.

[8 : 35] Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Josiah the son of Tikva opposed this, and Meshulam and Shabbathai the Levite supported them. Then the returned exiles did so.

Ezra the priest selected men, heads of fathers' houses, according to their fathers' houses, each of them designated by name. On the first day of the tenth month, they sat down to examine the matter,

and by the first day of the first month, they had come to the end of all the men who had married foreign women.

Now, they were found some of the sons of the priests who had married foreign women, Masaiah, Eliezer, Jerib, and Gedaliah, some of the sons of Jeshua, the son of Josedach, and his brothers. They pledged themselves to put away their wives, and their guilt offering was a ram of the flock for their guilt. Of the sons of Immer, Hanani, and Zebediah. Of the sons of Harim, Masaiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah.

Of the sons of Pasher, Elio and I, Masaiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Josabat, and Elisha. Of the Levites, Josabat, Shimei, Keliyah, that is Kalita, Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

[9 : 41] Of the singers, Eliashib. Of the gatekeepers, Shalom, Telem, and Uri. Are you taking notes for baby names here? And of Israel, of the sons of Parosh, Remiah, Isiah, Malkijah, Midjamin, Eleazar, Hashabiah, and Benaiah.

Of the sons of Elam, Mataniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah. Of the sons of Zatu, Elio and I, Eliashib, Mataniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza.

Of the sons of Bebi, were Jehoanan, Hananiah, Zabai, and Athali. Of the sons of Bani, were Meshulam, Malak, Adiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth. Of the sons of Peath, Moab, Adna, Shalal, Benaiah, Masaiah, Mataniah, Bezalel, Binui, and Manasseh.

Of the sons of Harim, Eleazar, Ishijah, Malkijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, Benjamin, Malak, and Shemariah. Of the sons of Hashum, Mataniah, Matata, that's my favorite, Hakuna Matata.

Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremiah, Manasseh, and Shimei. Of the sons of Bani, Madai, Amram, Uel, Benaiah, Bedeah, Shaluhi, Benaiah, Merimoth, Eliashib, Mataniah, Mataniah, Jasu.

[10 : 57] Of the sons of Benui, Shimei, Shalamiah, Nathan, Adiah, Machnadabai, Shashai, Shari, Azarel, Shalamiah, Shemariah, Shalom, Amariah, and Joseph.

And Joseph. A normal name. Of the sons of Nebo, Jael, Mattathiah, Zabad, Zabina, Jadai, Joel, and Benaiah.

All these had married foreign women, and some of the women had even born children. No, no, no. Don't do that.

Okay. All right. So the names aside, and the humor aside, how do the actual, how do the events, how do the actions taken in this chapter, how did they make you feel?

Let me take a little bit of a poll here. Did they make you feel, and I will raise my hand for this one. So raised hands here. Did they make you feel uncomfortable? Anyone feel uncomfortable about this?

[12 : 02] I think if we are taking seriously the events of this chapter, and we're really taking them to heart, we would feel uncomfortable. What if this happened to someone you knew?

What if you were there, and someone you knew had married a woman from another country, and now they were told, you have to send your wife and your children away? Because that's what the leaders of Israel decide to do.

That they have to send these foreign wives, and their children, away from their Israelite husbands, send them back to their peoples, and their families, back to where they came from. This intrusion, this breaking up of families, it offends our culture, doesn't it?

It offends our culture's values of tolerance and liberty. And for those of us who are Christians, it is offensive too. Because we also have the values, we have the values of compassion.

We have values of marital faithfulness. Jesus himself, didn't he say this about marriage? In Mark chapter 10, what therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.

[13 : 09] Well, it looks like they're separating right here. Paul, the Apostle Paul, in the book of 1 Corinthians, observes that if a Christian has married, if a Christian is in marriage with someone who is not a believer, that they shouldn't seek to be separated.

They should seek to be together as long as the other person is willing. So, we're presented here with an uncomfortable, possibly offensive text, and we have to ask ourselves this, why is the author telling us this?

Why is the author telling us this? What is the author trying to communicate to you and to me, to the readers here? And what does God want us to do with this?

What does God want us to do? How do we put this into practice with what we've learned from his word? Because if you took an approach to this text where you didn't understand biblical interpretation, you could walk away from this thinking, well, I married a woman who came from another country, I guess we were going to have to break up.

You know, if you were not careful to look at this text carefully in its role in salvation history, let's consider a few possibilities about this.

[14:19] The first possibility about how to look at these actions, how to interpret these actions, is this. The first possibility is that these actions were in fact the wrong thing to do.

They were in fact the wrong thing to do and they were unjust. Now that actually is a real possibility. That's a real possibility. In the narrative of scripture, there are a lot of supposedly righteous, supposedly godly people who do really bad things.

You can't read the Old Testament without noticing that. Abraham lies about his wife, Jacob, cheats his brother, Gideon institutes idol worship, David commits adultery and murder.

That's just, that's just a few. You could just go on and on and on and on and on about people doing the wrong thing. Just because the good guys do something, that doesn't mean it was the right thing to do.

Here's why I don't think that's what's going on here. In those cases, the author either expressly condemns what they're doing. He calls it outright, it's sin. Or he brings in another character.

[15:29] He tells us, he shows us what another character, another biblical figure has to say about it. Another biblical figure identifies it as sin. Sometimes the author doesn't explicitly identify it as sin, but drops very strong hints, shows the terrible consequences of that person's sin.

Ezra chapter 10, we don't get any hints whatsoever that this was the wrong thing. The author, in fact, as far as any commentary in these events go, the author lets Shekariah and Ezra speak.

And what they do, in verse 2, Shekariah says, we have broken faith with our God. Verse 10, Ezra says, you have broken faith and married foreign women.

So these are communicated as acts of unfaithfulness in their relationship with God. And Ezra's words, in verse 14, are recorded referring to the fierce wrath of our God over this matter.

In other words, God is fiercely angry. He is angry because he has been treated wrongly. And he is rightly angry over this. If there's any dissent at all, and verse 15, it's not even clear that these dissenters are opposed to this action.

[16:51] They might be opposed to the fact that the action is not happening more swiftly. We don't even know. If there's any people who disagree that this is the right thing to do, their words are not recorded. Their opinions are not recorded.

So I think it's fair to say the author does think this is the right thing to do. So why do these actions seem so wrong to us?

Why do they bother us? Why do they grate against our moral sensibilities? Well, there's a couple possibilities. First of all, maybe we just don't understand the circumstances.

Maybe the circumstances are so extreme that this is in fact the right action to take. That under normal circumstances this would be wrong, but under these circumstances it was the right thing to do. Second possibility.

Maybe we just don't value what God values. Maybe we don't see the world the way God sees the world. I suspect that for most of us probably both of these are true.

[17:53] We don't understand the circumstances and we don't value what God values. and we're going to explore that disconnect between ourselves and God in just a few minutes. But first, what we're going to do before we reach that disconnect and examine that is we have to take a step back because we want to take these words from God seriously.

We want to take these words that God the Holy Spirit has given to us very seriously and the right thing to do is we want to try to understand God's way of thinking.

We want to see the world on His terms, not on our own terms. We want to read this text on His terms, on our own terms. In other words, as we look at this, we want God's word to stand in judgment over us and our values rather than using our own values to judge God's word.

And the central theme of chapters 9 and 10 seems to be simply this repentance. The central theme is repentance. Now repentance is, once again, that's another word that we often don't use in our culture very much.

It seems to be confined to religious context. So we helpfully, in your bulletin, if you open it up, there's a section called The Theological Vocabulary Corner. And we had this definition last week.

[19:04] We repeated it again this week because this is a helpful definition Wayne Grudem gives in his Systematic Theology book that defines repentance. And Grudem says this, Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in

obedience to Christ.

So repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin. It is a renouncing of it. It is a sincere commitment to forsake it, to abandon it, to turn away from it, and to walk in obedience to Christ.

Or even shorter, I would say this, Repentance is turning away from sin, you were set on your sin, but now you turn away from it and you turn to God instead. Instead of your heart being set on sin, now it is set on the Lord God and that is backed up by your actions.

That is carried out in the real world. Now the overall theme of the book of Ezra has been this, the renewal of God's people. We've been examining that a lot this over the last nine weeks.

We've been talking about how God changes you and me, how he changes the church. We've been talking about how renewal begins with God. We've been talking about what it looks like when God renews, how he accomplishes it, how he does this, how this work of renewal is accomplished by God.

[20 : 19] And in chapter 10, we reach this conclusion. God renews his people by gathering them to repent of their sin. God renews his people by gathering them to repent of their sin.

And all the actions that are taken in this chapter are all actions of repentance. In fact, this chapter is, if you were to look to Grudem's definition again, everything that Grudem says happens in this chapter.

These are all actions of repentance. And we're going to see in Ezra chapter 10 that repentance is, first of all, united in remorse. It is second, ambitious in planning. And third, deliberate in execution.

So let's tackle those one at a time. Let's learn about repentance. God renews his people by gathering them to repent of their sin. And first of all, repentance is united in remorse.

Repentance is united in remorse. And we see this in verses 1 through 6. Ezra is finished with his prayer of confession. And after this, he is joined in verse 1 by a crowd of his fellow Israelites, men, women, and children, a large group of people from all walks of life.

[21 : 29] And then one of the leaders, a man named Shekariah, he speaks up to Ezra in verse 2 on behalf of the crowd. And what he does is he affirms Ezra's sense of remorse.

He affirms Ezra's remorse, his contrition over the people's sin. He says this in verse 2. We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land.

So first of all, repentance begins with an attitude of remorse or contrition that is shared among God's people. It is shared among God's people. We have to understand, first of all, why do Shekariah, why do the other Israelites, why do they agree with Ezra?

Why do they share his remorse? Well, earlier, remember we talked about this possibility. We might be misunderstanding the circumstances here. We might not be valuing what God values.

Now, Jonathan, last week, as we studied Ezra chapter 9, he pointed out that God had explicitly forbidden marriage between Israelites and people from the other people groups who were living in the land with them.

[22 : 37] And the reason that God had done so can be found in Deuteronomy chapter 7 where the Israelites are warned about these people. They're warned in chapter 7 of Deuteronomy, they would turn away your sons from following me to serve other gods.

In other words, they will lead the people into a spiritual adultery, unfaithfulness. And that is exactly what happened to Israel. These were not empty words. This was not an empty concern.

This is not paranoia. That's exactly what happened. The people of Israel turned from the Lord. They served other gods. They gave themselves over to a wide array of evil behavior, a wide array of incredibly unjust behavior on an individual and a social level as a result.

And once again, it is happening again. They are in danger of abandoning their covenant relationship with God. They are behaving as an unfaithful partner in the covenant.

People, Israel's history has already shown how the entire people of God have been corrupted through this practice. And if that was then when the nation was stronger, how much more so now?

[23 : 48] How much more so now when they are weak, when they are few in numbers, when they are easily influenced by more powerful neighbors around them? Their circumstances here require grave and decisive action.

This can't be tolerated. And as much as God does value keeping families together, that is absolutely a priority to the Lord. He speaks out fiercely against divorce.

He speaks out strongly in favor of people staying faithful to their covenants to one another, to their marriage. But God values the faithfulness of the people to himself even more.

Keeping these families together, it might seem like it is the compassionate thing to do in the short term, but the long-term fallout for the people of Israel would be absolutely disastrous.

And not just for them, but for us as well. That's because what would happen is the Israelites would become absorbed into the stronger, more numerous peoples around them.

[24 : 56] Their identity as God's people would eventually erode away. They would no longer become a separate nation, but disappear slowly from the face of the earth. And the faithful community of God's people would not be preserved for the coming of a Savior, the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

So in short, if these families are not broken up, Christmas never happens. This is the original war on Christmas. When we understand these circumstances, when we value what God values, when we see the world the way that God sees the world, and when we know that God sees all things, he knows the future, I believe that we will ultimately agree with God's assessment.

These actions are painful, they're awful, but they're necessary. Nobody likes feeling a sharp knife cutting into themselves.

Nobody likes feeling a knife tearing apart flesh and tissue, but when you find yourself on the table of an operating room slowly dying, a sharp knife is the very best thing that could happen to you.

And this kind of extreme surgery can only happen when God's people are united in remorse. That is the only time there is the will for this to take place.

[26 : 21] There has to be a unity among God's people. This can't be an individual thing. To tell the truth, you know, I was just thinking through this week, is there any time in the Bible when an individual repents, turns away from sin, turns toward God, apart from God's people?

Maybe there is. If you can find an example, feel free to share it with me afterwards. If so, it is the exception to the rule. Repentance seems to take place when an individual receives correction from God's people, and usually repentance takes place not on an individual level, but as a community, like we see here.

It's not just one individual person coming to change of heart, it's the whole community together, repenting. If repentance seems to be in short supply among God's people, and so let's think about our church here.

If maybe you're thinking, I see sin in other people's lives, I see sinful behavior in the lives of others, I see things that they're doing that are wrong, they're living in the wrong way, why aren't they repenting? Why does repentance seem in short supply in this church?

I think it's fair to ask whether it's because we're isolating ourselves from one another, whether we're siloing off, sectioning off our lives from other people so they can't look into our lives, so they can't correct us, so that I can make my important life decisions all by myself without the input and the wisdom of God's people.

[27 : 56] Maybe when we see the sins of other people, our first thought should be this, maybe my own individualism, my own refusal to allow God's people into my life, my own failure to live in community to them is contributing to that, that I am part of the problem, and that I, too, need God's people to be a real part of my life, helping me make decisions, helping me turn away from sin, holding me accountable to my relationship and my commitment to the Lord.

God renews his people by gathering them to repent of their sin, and this repentance is first of all united in remorse. Second, this repentance is ambitious in planning.

This repentance is ambitious in planning. And we see beginning in verse 7 that the leaders of Israel call for a mandatory meeting of all the exiles.

I mean, that whole threat of confiscation of property and being basically ostracized was, well, they really meant business. They're gathering in the open in the absolute driving, pouring rain.

Remember, this was a few years before Gore-Tex was invented, right? So, they're standing in the round. They have no way of keeping dry. They recognize we've got to take care of this.

[29 : 28] Rain, snow, sleet, or hail. And they recognize that they're debating the issue. Here's a problem. We can't resolve this in one day. This is too big. This is such a systematic, problematic sin.

It cannot be tackled in a single meeting. And so what they do in verse 14 is they lay out a plan.

Verse 14, let our officials stand for the whole assembly.

Let all in our cities who have taken foreign wives come at appointed times and with them the elders and judges of every city until the fierce wrath of our God over this matter is turned away from us.

So they're putting a plan together for dealing with their sin in the real world. And this is important. I have a tendency and I seem to notice this among most Christians, especially those who have been in church for a long time, who have been in the faith for a long time, we have a tendency to treat sin as though it were this abstraction.

Like, oh, yes, I'm a sinner. It isn't sin bad. And yes, you know, it's something that we shouldn't be sinning and so forth. Like it's some sort of nebulous abstraction. Or maybe we do see it for what it is.

[30 : 40] Maybe we see it in the real world. Maybe we recognize wrong attitudes. Maybe we recognize wrong patterns of behavior that we are living out. And maybe we even experience remorse about it.

Maybe we even pray that God will change us. But we forget this. God does not typically save us from the presence of sin in our lives apart from our own planning and effort.

God does not save us from the presence of sin in our lives apart from our own planning and effort. Not typically. If you're familiar with theological terms like justification and sanctification, maybe all of a sudden red flags are going off.

You're like, is this guy saying that we're only saved, we're saved by all the good things we do? I think it's helpful to distinguish between what's going on here because you and I, we've been saved, we've been justified by faith in Jesus Christ.

What that means is that we know we're not good enough. We know that we, in and of ourselves, don't have what it takes to please God. We have insulted Him, we've angered Him over our sin.

[31 : 48] We deserve punishment, eternal punishment for our sins. But God has given His own Son, Jesus Christ. He lived a perfect life, died on the cross, and was raised to life again.

He lived that perfect life in our place. We believe in Him. We who are Christians believe in Him. We have faith in Him that God forgives our sins on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done.

And so we're united to Jesus Christ by faith. So we are credited with His righteousness. We have been justified, made righteous, saved, apart from our own human effort.

But the Bible also speaks of salvation in another term. The other term, theological term, we often use is sanctification.

This is referring to our ongoing salvation. When you and I are sanctified, what that means is through the power of the Holy Spirit of God, we are being changed.

[32 : 51] Justification means God looks at us as righteous. Sanctification means we are actually being made righteous. And the way we think, the attitudes of our heart, our motives, and the way we live.

If you've been part of the journey class that we've been holding at the 9 o'clock hour, that's what the journey class has been all about as we study how people change. It's been about sanctification.

How change starts from the heart. How God works to sanctify us, to save us, by delivering us from sin that is still remaining inside of us. And this ongoing work of salvation is God's work.

But scripture makes it very clear that it's also our work. Sanctification is also our work. It's a both and, not an either or. That's why the author of Hebrews writes the following, and I could use many other examples.

Here's a great one. Hebrews chapter 12 verses 1 through 4. The author of Hebrews writes this, Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses. And he's referring to the people of God from long ago.

[34 : 00] And that would include the people in Ezra chapter 10. Let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely. That's a commandment.

Let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely. And let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

That last verse tells us what sanctification looks like. What does it look like when we fight against sin? What does it look like when we look to Jesus Christ and want to be like him, battling sin?

And the author of Hebrews says it is a struggle. It is a battle. In terms of severity, it is like shedding your blood. It is bleeding your life onto the ground.

[35 : 12] And that's what it feels like. It feels like you are dying. In the case of Jesus Christ, he resisted temptation far beyond what we could.

Jesus Christ resisted temptation that would snap you and me in half like a twig, but he did not bend, but he did not break. He resisted it to the point of death.

It cost him his very life. So the author of Hebrews is raising this question to you and to me. Is your battle against sin costing you anything?

Is your battle against sin costing you anything? Are you planning and preparing for war? Because no country ever goes to war without ambitious planning, without ambitious preparation.

In fact, I was safe and I was deliberating this week. Do I say this because I'm going to incriminate myself when I do?

[36 : 18] But I think it's a good thing to say. If you haven't laid out any plans, specific concrete plans to combat sin in your life, if you haven't brought God's people in on those plans, you're not being serious about your sin.

You haven't taken to heart the warning from the theologian John Owen who said this, be killing sin or it will be killing you. Be killing sin or it will be killing you.

And it doesn't matter if I say that I believe I've got sin in my life. You know, it's like, yeah, I'm a sinner, man, I'm just a real sinner. I'm real broken.

It doesn't matter if I can quote to you 15 reformed theologians on the doctrine of total depravity. It doesn't matter. If I am not working together with a few key brothers and sisters in Christ, if I'm not making specific plans to kill off my sin, then what is happening is I am functionally and practically denying that I have a problem with sin.

I am functionally and practically denying the doctrine of depravity. And in so doing, what's happening is I am grieving God, the Holy Spirit. I'm rejecting and fighting back against his work of renewal in my life.

[37 : 37] God wants what is best for you and me. God loves us so much he will not allow us to remain the way we are. He wants what is best for us even when we don't.

And he won't allow us to continue as we are. He wants us to overcome the sin that is still present in our lives so we can experience new life, new joy, new freedom, new hope in him.

This sounds awful, this war, this battle, but it is worth it. It is brutal, but it brings joy. It brings new life.

God renews his people by gathering them to repent of their sin. Repentance is, first of all, united in remorse. It is, second, ambitious in planning. And third and finally, repentance is deliberate in execution.

Repentance is deliberate in execution. And we see this truth illustrated, once again, in Ezra chapter 10, beginning in verse 16. We see the returned exiles of the people of Israel begin to execute the plans that they have put into place.

[38 : 46] Verses 16 through 17. We have a designated group of leaders beginning a lengthy investigation. They generate a list of names beginning, that list begins in verse 18.

Verse 19, the expected results are made clear. Each man on the list must send away the foreign wife. The plans are carried out carefully, they're carried out deliberately, they're carried out decisively.

I think a lot of times we're not deliberate in our approach to sin. Repentance, here's what repentance is not. Repentance is not a New Year's resolution. Here's what a New Year's resolution is, I think.

It's an impulsive decision and half-hearted plans. Right? Let's take, you know, one of the most common New Year's resolutions, like, I need to lose weight. Right? And so usually, because I said, well, I'm going to start going to the gym like three times a week and that's as far as it gets, right? And so you start going to the gym three times a week and it peters out after a month. That's what I'm, I'm not looking forward to January, to the beginning of January because whenever I go to the gym, that is the worst.

[39 : 55] That's the worst time of year to go to the gym because all the machines and everything are in use because everyone's using them and you have to wait. But after a month and a half, everything's back to normal again. And the reason things are back to normal again in so many

people's lives is because they didn't seriously plan and they didn't seriously execute.

Because what happens is they just have a general goal, you know, I'm going to work out three times a week or something like that, but they don't think how they have to restructure their entire lives to accomplish that. That means I have to go to bed a lot earlier.

It means I have to restructure my evening. It means I have to restructure my morning and how I spend it. It means I have to bring and enlist other people to hold me accountable, maybe to come along with me. It requires strategic planning.

It requires deliberate, careful execution. I think a lot of times our approach to sin is the same way. We have these sort of vague notions that we want to turn away from sin.

We want to turn away from the attitudes that we know are wrong. And we start trying it out, but then we abandon it without any lasting change. What repentance means, we've been talking, first of all, I want to characterize repentance does not, repentance is the work of the Lord.

[41 : 06] And we've, if, I'm speaking about this in context with the prior nine sermons, that where we've seen renewal and repentance begin with the Lord and is the work of the Lord to accomplish it.

But as for our part, we need to carefully consider how we can prepare our lives, how we can enlist the help of others in the church, in our community of faith, how we can have them hold us accountable or join in with us, how we can have them remind us continually of the truth of the gospel and remind us of the good news that changes us, and how we can constantly work with them to reevaluate our plans to ensure they're effective, to make any changes that need to be made.

Repentance is not simply a change in my opinions, in my feelings, in my attitudes. It is that. But it takes more.

Repentance is judged by a change in actions, a change in a pattern of behavior in my life. Paul Tripp, an author and counselor that we've been learning a lot from in our journey class, he has this great line, you will hear this from me more than once.

Maybe you've already heard it from me. Change hasn't taken place until change has taken place. Which sounds incredibly obvious, but is incredibly profound, especially in a counseling situation.

[42 : 25] Insight is not change, is what he adds after that. The reason he has to say that is because sometimes we learn a new truth about God or a new truth about ourselves, we gain some sort of new insight, and it's exciting, isn't it?

Wow! This is exciting. Everything is different now. I feel like a new man. A week later, it's like it never happened. Insight.

Insight, mere insight, is not change. Change is change. Repentance is deliberate in execution. It requires a follow-through, and it brings lasting, remaining patterns of change in our lives so that we become holy from the heart out, all the way out to our actions, all the way out to the words we speak to one another, all the way out to our actions, all the way out to the way we spend our time, to the way we spend our money, to what we value.

We become holy like Jesus Christ, our Lord, is holy. So we've learned that God renews his people by gathering them to repent of their sin. Repentance is united in remorse.

Repentance is ambitious in planning. Repentance is deliberate in execution. So in my mind, all we've got left is one final question. When we look at Ezra chapter 10, why does the book of Ezra end here?

[43 : 48] Isn't that a really weird place to end it? We end it with this weird list of names. I mean, this guy needs to take a writing class, right? Why does a story about God renewing his people, a story that should be filled with hope, end abruptly on a down note with a list of guilty individuals and a painful act of surgery on God's people?

I think what this tells us is this. Repentance is the capstone of renewal. In other words, God's work of renewal is not complete until repentance and real change has taken place.

God's work of renewal will not hold up unless repentance, real change, has taken place among his people. God's work of renewal is aimed ultimately to bring his people to repentance, to turn from their former sins, to embrace their new way of life in God's kingdom, to become what God has made them to be in Christ, to take advantage of the resources they have in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit to know their new identity and to live it out.

Their new way of life in God's kingdom, their new values as part of God's dearly loved family. God's priority for you and for me is our holiness.

that you and I are set apart as his own, as his treasured possession, that we turn to him for the solid joys, for the unfading happiness that can only be found in him.

[45 : 19] We experience new life and eternal life in God's presence when he gathers us to repent of our sin. Renewal culminates in repentance.

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