

# Ezra 9

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Preacher: Billy Joe Calvert

[0:00] In the system that everyone knew the Word, we still in the Old Testament. We tend to view Old Testament practices and theology and even culture in how we view it.

! You have the scripture, you have the opportunity to sit down and read the Word. It's not the case during Ezra's time. They knew what sacrifices they should offer, they knew the festivals, but did they know the Word?

And we're looking at the remnant of people by the time Ezra gets there. They've all been born in Babylon. Okay? They are Jewish descent and heritage and they are of Jewish lineage.

But they weren't born in the promised land. They weren't born under the covenant promises of God. They were born in captivity. They are still living under the Persian rule.

They were born outside of the promised land. They were born outside of temple worship and all the instructions. They didn't have a king who would stand up and recite the book of Deuteronomy the way the king was supposed to do.

[1:10] They didn't have any of these things. So really we're looking at the group of people who say, well, we're supposed to offer sacrifices and we don't know why. We don't know the kind of the Word behind it. They can't consult their Bible because they don't have a Bible. God is, we're in the era of prophets and priests and Levites and scribes and teachers.

God is ordaining Ezra that God. Okay? He's the one who's going to go teach them the Word. He starts this scribal school that is so important in biblical history.

We've kind of alluded to it before. But now with all that in mind, with kind of that background, that context, we see Ezra 9. And he kind of gives us a little bit better understanding. He says, now when these things had been completed, that is the brain of the articles giving it to them.

When these things had been completed, the princes approached me saying, the people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands.

According to their abominations, those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Gerizites, the Jebusites, the Ananites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the land.

[2:26] Indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness. When I heard about this matter, I tore my garment and my robe. I pulled some of the hair from my head and my beard and sat down appalled.

Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel on account of the unfaithfulness of the exiles gathered to me. And I sat appalled until the evening offering.

But at the evening offering, I arose from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn. And I fell on my knees and stretched out my hands to the Lord my God.

And I said, O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to you, my God. For our iniquities have risen above our heads and our guilt has grown even to the heavens.

Since the days of our fathers, to this day we have been in great guilt. And on account of our iniquities, we, our kings and our priests, have been given into the hand of the kings of the land, to the sword, to captivity, and to plunder, and to open shame, as it is this day.

[3:32] But now for a brief moment, grace has been shown from the Lord our God to leave us an escaped remnant, and to give us a peg in this holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage.

For we are slaves, yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, but has extended loving kindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us reviving, to raise up the house of our God, to restore its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem.

Now our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments, which you have commanded by your servants the prophets, saying, The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which they have filled in from end to end with their impurity.

So now do not give your daughters to their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons, and never seek their peace or their prosperity, that you may be strong, and eat the good things of the land, and leave it as an inheritance to your sons forever.

After all that has come upon us for our inequalities and our great guilt, since you, our God, have requited us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us an escaped remnant as this, shall we again break your commandments, and enter the land with the peoples who have committed these abominations?

[ 5 : 06 ] Would you not be angry with us to the point of destruction, until there is no remnant, nor any who escape? O Lord God of Israel, you are righteous, for you have been left, or for you have been left an escaped remnant as it is this day.

Behold, we are before you in our guilt, for no one can stand before you because of this. We'll just see this evening how you respond to the wrongs of society.

Responding to the wrongs of society. Now, before we cast too much judgment upon the people of Israel, we shouldn't be surprised by the way they're living.

As I said, they were born into Babylonian captivity. They were born interspersed among various people groups. They were born living among people of different nationalities and different nations, and now they have been given an opportunity to return back to the Promised Land.

After the decree of King Cyrus, what Cyrus did not do, Cyrus did not evacuate everyone that the Assyrians had moved into that land before he asked the Israelites to go back.

[ 6 : 21 ] He gave them permission to go back, but the land was not unoccupied. We know about it because we read about it in the book of Nehemiah. We also read about it in the early pages of the book of Ezra. There were people living there.

There were people who had been living and intermarried with a small remnant. If you remember from the book of Jeremiah, the poorest of the poor were left to tend to land.

Well, the Assyrians, when the northern kingdom fell, moved in people from all the other empires they destroyed, and they lived there and intermingled with those that were left behind. By the way, you know a king of this descent.

He's a very popular king. He's not a really good king, but he's a well-known king, and you know him really well. And you know him really well, especially at this time of the year, because his name is Herod. Herod the Great.

The reason he was so hated by the Jewish people was because he was half Jew. He was in a man. In a man would be the people that the Assyrians moved in, but his family had intermarried with Jewish people, so he used his prominent position in the world and then his very convenient position of Jewish lineage to ascend to the throne in the Roman Empire.

[ 7 : 27 ] Did a lot of good things politically. Did a lot of terrible things personally. Killed all of his children to save one. Killed a couple of his wives. Slew all the children in Bethlehem.

You know the account. But the reason he was so hated by the Pharisees and the people of strong Jewish descent is because he was still that remnant left over, his lineage was, of when the Assyrians had done it.

But now, go back. When Ezra shows up, the people who have come from the Babylonian region have moved into Atlanta.

That's just what they're doing there. That's how they live. That's the way the world operates. Right?

If you're coming back and we're all family, we like to look at this, I like to look at it in a very linear, practical way.

It's a small number of people come back and you start having sons and daughters. Your selection for, you know, mates for those sons and daughters is very limited. Unless you begin to look at the way the rest of the world is looking.

[ 8 : 28 ] And so they're just living the way society has been existing. But what's been interjected into this, this wrong, is Ezra, who knows the word, who knows the truth.

And so we see this, and so we want to bring this application before we really kind of get into it. We live in a world in which many things are accepted as common practice. Many things are accepted

as, that's just the way society is.

And it's real easy to sit on the outside of it, kind of wag the finger, and condemn society. Much like Ezra could have, or Daniel could have, or Nehemiah could have.

But our question is, how are we going to respond to the wrong of society? The first thing that we notice with Ezra, by the way, it is not illiterate tonight, but it is ABCD, so I like that.

I kind of had to do it, but I'm out of it. Okay? So there's the first thing, there has to be an awareness of sin. There has to be an awareness of the fact that something is wrong. It says that when Ezra showed up, they deposited all the go-to treasures into the temple.

[ 9 : 36 ] He left the Levites to it because it's their job, their responsibilities. And after all these things, the princes of the land came up and told him. There's nothing wrong with that because we know that some people reported back to Paul some wrongs that were happening in the churches.

When Paul wrote the church at Corinth, 1 Corinthians, it had been reported to him what was going on. That's not what we would call tattletales of people just whining and complaining. No. Ezra is now a man with the commissioning of not only the king but the Lord God Almighty.

And he needs to understand what is happening in the society that God has called him to do. Paul carried the burden of the churches, the daily burden of the churches which he had begun.

And the Lord used that as he was made aware of problems and wrongs that were going on so that he could correct them. But here's Ezra, a man who shows up and says, the people came to me and they began telling me what's going on.

Notice it's the Levites and the priests. Now we should understand that's why he had to bring more Levites with him, correct? Because the Levites that were there had begun to intermarry. The priests that were there had begun to intermarry.

[ 10 : 39 ] So the Levites, the priests, the princes, that is the leaders, the leading men, all of those had begun to accept this practice, had begun to accept this is just the way it is.

So to put it in today's term, the church began to live like the world instead of standing out from the world. And they began to look because what we find in the Old Testament is not only God is just saying because there's a temptation, because it tells us that the holy seed had intermarried with the wicked people.

So there's these special people. No. The reason the people were wicked is not because they weren't Jewish. It's because their wickedness and their atrocities had filled the earth from one end to the other, the text tells us.

Their deeds and what they were doing in their practice, is God had told his people, I don't want you living like that. I don't want you intermarrying with that because what fellowship has light with darkness, I understand.

And it's not that I'm just telling you you're better than them, but you are my people. You are set apart. And what they're doing is not pleasing in my sight. So don't live that way. And when we begin to see what's happening, they were offering their children to Moloch and child sacrifice.

[ 11 : 47 ] They were doing untold abominations. abominations. And God telling his people not to get intermarried with them is not condemning those people, their judgments and their actions had brought condemnation on them.

What he is telling is his people, you're different. You're set apart. You're going to declare my glory to these people, which by the way is a very gracious thing to put someone different alongside of them, to put someone who lived different beside them.

I'm reading in the book of Amos, right? The Bible of the prophet in the book of Amos. And God is declaring to Amos that he's going to bring judgment and Amos is calling out and he says, no, don't do that.

And he says, well, I'm going to do this. And Amos calls out and says, no, don't do that. And then what's God saying? God says, I'm going to set a plumb line among them. Why? So that they may know they fall short.

Now we know the plumb line is Jesus Christ. But you know the plumb line in the Old Testament was the nation of Israel was supposed to be the plumb line living among the wicked of the world so that they would know there's something wrong with the way we're living.

[ 12 : 51 ] The church is the plumb line. The one that is supposed to be true to the way God has called them. And now Ezra begins to hear they're not the plumb line. They're beginning to be just like everyone else.

And there becomes this awareness. Those that were there thought nothing of it. Ezra immediately responds. So he says, so I rent my clothing and my robe and I pulled the hair out of my beard and out of my hair and I sat down and appalled.

The legacy standard says I sat down in consternation. I like that word because it kind of gives you the weight of what he's doing. He said, I sat down not angrily but just appalled at the awareness of what is going on.

And it wasn't Ezra doing it. Too often I feel like we stand up wagging the finger saying everything around us is wrong. But how often do we sit down appalled or in consternation at the wrong that is going on in the world around us.

With the awareness of the sin because it is not just a condemning these people who are going to deserve for their gift. It is an acknowledgement and an awareness that these are individuals that are standing under the judgment of the Lord God on life.

[14:11] Charles Spurgeon once said if men and women be condemned to an everlasting hell may they only get there over our kneeling bodies as we cry out seeking to save and redeem those on the road.

May we stand and kneel and sit appalled at the sin that is leading them. What does it say in the New Testament? Some stashing out with the fire hating even the garments defiled by the sin not saying well they are going to get what they deserve.

It is an awareness of the sin and the consequences that are going to take place because of the sin. Second there is a burden of shame.

There is a burden of shame. Ezra tears his clothes tears his robe pulls the hair out he pulls the hair out of his hair he pulls the hair of his head and his beard Nehemiah the poor leader rips the hair out of other people's heads and deards there is a lot hair pulling going on that's what he might but he takes this burden look it says that he sat down appalled he was in misery of what was going on there is this one line that says then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel on account of this unfaithfulness of the exiles gathered to me and I sat appalled until the evening offering and there is this burden right but at the evening offering he gets up he says he gets up in the wording there in the New

American Standard it's humiliation it could also be from fasting he says but at the evening offering I rose from my humiliation this position I put myself in why because now the evening offering by the way is the meal offering he's not going to eat but he's going to bring to the Lord his God a sacrifice of mourning and weeping and lament and he's going to come before the Lord and I love when he says I got up so that I can hit my knees stretch out my hands and say Lord God I'm ashamed I can't even lift up my face to you see the burden of the shame he says I can't even lift my face up now here's the question I was asked Ezra hadn't done any of this Ezra had not committed any of these sins when Daniel prays and Daniel prays for the sins of the nation because he reads in the book of Jeremiah the 70 years and knows when the time is completed and Daniel begins to pray he opens up the windows in his room and he's praying and Daniel begins to profess our sins we have done this we have done that

[17:24] Ezra now he says I'm ashamed to lift my hands up because we have sinned so great a matter our guilt is worthy of this this is shame this is burden of mine because it's more than just people doing bad things it's the representation of the Lord God among the nations that is being him it is his identification with the fact that God is not represented just by how I live but by how all of his people live there ought to be a burden of shame in our day and if we're just going to be quite honest with it about some of the representations of the Lord God Almighty about quote unquote churches and there ought to be this burden of God we have really brought disgrace and shame to your name he said I didn't do it well no it's not really about our glory and our recognition right it's about his and he begins to identify with the people living this way not because he's going to accept their guilt but because he's more concerned about the glory of

God among the nations than he is his own nations he's not like the Pharisee that Jesus talks about in prayer and says I praise you oh God that I'm not sinning like this man I fast twice a week I do this I do that he's not that guy he's the guy your name is being disgraced and it's my fault it's our fault it is shame at the burden of guilt that is being put because of the actions of God's people this awareness of sin brought this burden of shame led to a confession of guilt he says God we've done it but look what he says he doesn't say I can't even lift up my head he says oh God I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift my face to you my God for our evil is arisen above our heads and our guilt

has grown even into the heavens look at this verse 7 since the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt over and over and over again this isn't something dude this is our problem this is something that we do and on account of our iniquities we our kings and our priests have been given into the hands of the kings of the land as it is this day remember they're not a free nation here they're still a captive people with some freedoms we'll get to that in just a moment but they are still a captive people and the reason they are captive is because of their guilt and he acknowledges that we're not who we should be and it's our fault it's our guilt and it's the result of our actions and this is Ezra the one who knows the law practices the law and teaches the law and yet he's identifying I have a sneaking suspicion the reason we don't like to identify with the sins of those around us in our prayers and maybe it's a sneaking suspicion because possibly it's the root of my own cause for not doing so too often my sneaking suspicion is I'm afraid that if I identify with the sins of others I will be faced to confess my own sins I will be forced to acknowledge that it's not just others who fall short but I do too and if the shame and the guilt that is brought upon the name of the Lord is not just everybody else's fault but it's partly my fault it's my responsibility it's my or lack thereof or my sins of commission or omission however you want to declare it by identifying with them I have to join in the confession of my own failure we like to think that we're doing okay we're better than they are I'm not intermarrying with the other people I'm not doing this the reality is is that we all need to come to this place of confession of guilt but one of the glorious things in this passage I love the fact that every passage like this has a high note so we get to the high note that is the deed of the declaration of God's mercy with the mercy that just runs through the passage Ezra says we deserve to be captive verse 8 says that now for a brief moment grace has been shown from the Lord our God he acknowledges the whole reason they are able to come back and rebuild the temple is God's grace they didn't deserve it they didn't earn it they will come out of Babylonian captivity the most mildly the most of the people we said that over and over again they went into a very polytheistic worshipping multitude of gods they come out monotheistic worshipping only the one God not worshipping according to his word falling short sure but they never go back into idolatrous worship again never read the nation visible doing that they don't go back to idolatry don't know the bells and the ashes and all those things that that cleansed in their captivity but they weren't right right they weren't getting it together all together

I mean the last book we had to do Old Testament the book of Malachi it says the Lord God says I wish you just shut the doors of the temple and quit off your sacrifices because you're bringing me things that aren't acceptable I mean you're not worshipping idols anymore but you're!

[ 23 : 31 ] But what he says here is that even then grace was the reason God allowed them to rebuild the temple for a brief moment to leave us an escaped remnant and give us a peg in his holy place that our God may light our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage so he says everything they're earning and they're singing and they're worship is all of grace I love verse 9 the reason I love verse 9 because it doesn't have application just for we are slaves everyone is a slave to something people say I'm not a slave right well Jesus says the slave of God and the slave of sickness you're serving a master somewhere you're serving the Lord God as your master or you're serving sickness as your master because I'm an independent person I'm doing whatever I want that is one of the greatest lies from the business of hell has ever been told to the prince of this world or the prince of life but look what verse 9 says we are slaves and in our bondage our

God has not forsaken us in our bondage our God has not forsaken us I look back to my own life when I was a slave of sin and a slave of Satan serving his ways even when I bought them all the ways even in my slavery the Lord God did not forsake me for I could not buy my own freedom and purchase my own freedom but he did not forsake me he redeemed me he called me he saved me he purchased me he bought me and now he moves over me in our slavery he does not forsake us yet in our bodies our God has forsaken us but has extended loving kindness to us to give us the! to raise up the house of our God to restore his ruins and give us a wall in Judah's cruisers all this is your grace and your mercy we don't deserve any of this and then we move on it says verse 13 after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and our great guilt this is where we can say Lord hallelujah much like Ezra does here we can say to because when we have this awareness of sin we understand it is our evil deeds and our great guilt but why do we praise because look at what it says since you are God have requited us less than our iniquities deserve you know if we got what our iniquities deserve it's everlasting separation and judgment but God in his grace and mercy has requited us less than our iniquities deserve because he put our shame and our guilt and our burden

and our penalty upon his son

Jesus Christ on the cross and he says I will require that of you that's grace that's mercy and that led Ezra to say I'm no better than these people I deserve everything that's come our way God you've requited us less than that so since you've required less than that he said then how can we continue to live the way we're living and raise our faces to you since this is what you've done for us since there is this declaration of your mercy over our life and since what I deserve I don't get how can I choose and this is a question that's right as the kind of student there how dare I choose to live like everyone else I still raise that face before you and the simple answer that is you can't how do we respond to the wrongs of society

I think much like Ezra we begin with ourselves and say if this is who the Lord God is to me what do I need to do where am I at Ezra will change society he will teach the word he will reconcile the people back to the Lord God he will have this wonderful thing in Nehemiah where they build a platform and they stand for half the people begin to understand the word and know the word and the people will mourn so much they will have Ezra's response later they will hear the word and they will know their shame they will know their guilt and they will be crying and weeping so much that Ezra and the Levites will have to tell them don't weep today is a day of rejoicing don't weep any longer and not to tell them to stop crying Ezra could have the moment he heard he said get everybody up here we gotta read the Bible it's time they hear how bad they are but before he did he said oh God

[ 28 : 39 ] I wanna make sure I'm right I wanna make sure I know where I'm at I'm a part of the problem too David would cry out search me help me to know my way to cause my desperate ways try me Psalm 51 is a very repentant psalm it's written I think but why does David write Psalm 51 and ask how to cleanse him and restore him and to wash him so that I may teach others your word Ezra said there's a big problem there's a big problem in our society because the world's going desperately down and down and down too often the church stood outside the problem and said you guys have a problem

I think every now and then if you're very becoming of the church the fall on our faces and say maybe we are part of the problem and then once we realize how much grace and mercy God has shown us then we can say now this will help the world with their problem because the truth of scripture is that we deserve everything they deserve our neighbors our wickedness our evil needs deserve just as much judgment as anyone else but God has acquitted us less than we deserve so praise you God you cross Jesus our own now how can we help others get out of their problems too we'll see it down and that's right after enough ok now say come