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Ezra / Ezra 9–10

Introduction

- <https://www.foxnews.com/travel/tsa-sounds-alarm-world-cup-fans-pack-bags-american-staple> - Visitors to USA discovering what's unique about our country and loving it. Ranch Dressing, Buccees, etc.
- We've found something far better than the comforts of the USA. We've found a relationship with the God of all creation.
- "Taste and see that the Lord is good. How happy is the person who takes refuge in him!" ([Psalm 34:8](#))
- You know the Lord is good. You've seen evidence of His goodness in your life. Yet even after we've tasted God's goodness, we're still tempted to believe that something else will satisfy us more. E.g., more money, giving in to sinful desires, more relationships, etc.
- Because we're tempted to believe that something else will satisfy us more than God, we drift in our relationship with God.
- Israel had tasted the goodness of God. He brought them out of exile and empowered them to rebuild the temple, but it didn't take long for Israel to drift from the Lord.
- The closing chapters of Ezra describe not only Israel drifting from the Lord, but also their return to the Lord.
- This morning, as we look at the concluding chapters of Ezra, I want to you to see three warnings from this text to keep you from drifting away

from the Lord. If you have drifted from the Lord, this passage will encourage you to return to the Lord.

Don't underestimate the influence of relationships.

- vs. 1 - It didn't take long for the Israelites to return to their old ways. Leaders of Israel approach Ezra to inform him that the people of Israel, including their spiritual leaders, had taken wives from among the pagan people.
- God's Word was clear about this ([Deuteronomy 7:1-4](#)). God forbid that His people not marry foreign women because their hearts would be led away from Yahweh and they would worship the gods of the pagans. In Israel's history, it happened over and over again. Even King Solomon fell to idolatry.
- The issue was not interracial marriage. (E.g.m Moses and Boaz married people of different races.) The issue was interfaith marriage - the mixing of religions.
- God gave these commands to protect Israel's devotion to Him and to protect the holy seed (vs. 2). Remember, God promised that a Messiah would come from the seed of Israel ([Gen. 3:15](#), [Gen. 12](#), [2 Samuel 7](#)).
- Israel existed to preserve the covenant line through which the Messiah would come. To step into interfaith marriages was to disregard God's covenant purposes.
- vs. 3 - Ezra's grief - tearing tunic and robes signs of grief over the people's sin. Ezra knows what's at stake. He sees history repeating itself.
- People drift because they allow the people closest to them to shape their values more than God's Word.

- Three questions:
- **Are you choosing relationships that encourage faithfulness to Christ or encourage compromise?**
 - A strong warning to single people: the person you marry will be the most influential person in your life. Period. It's better to be single than to be married to someone who will draw your heart away from God.
 - A strong warning to all of us: the people you're closest to will affect the way you think, the decisions you make, and how you live your life. Choose your friends wisely.
 - What do the people you're closest to prioritize? Do they normalize sin? Do the people closest to you influence you to think things like: "Maybe it's not that big of a deal?" Or, "Maybe I've been too strict."
- **What is the goal of your closest friendships?**
 - THIS is the question we don't think about near enough. Is the goal just companionship? Someone to hang out? To share mutual hobbies? The goal of your closest relationships needs to be pursuit of Christlikeness.
 - That's the goal of your marriage. That should also be the goal of our relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - Nothing wrong with enjoying hobbies together, but you need relationships that you can talk about Scripture, pray together, hold each other accountable, etc.
 - NOT saying to not have friends that are not Christians, but I am saying those who are closest to you will be the greatest influences on your life.
- **Are you hindering those close to you from following Jesus?**
 - "I wish so and so would hear this..." Perhaps you're the one who needs to hear this warning because you're the one hindering people.

- Are you helping the people around you love Jesus more, or are you making it easier for them to compromise? By your gossip? By your anger? By your crude language?
- vs. 2 - The leaders had taken the lead in this unfaithfulness! The ones that were supposed to set the example of godliness became the example of compromise.
- Clear warning in these opening verses: your relationships matter.

Don't overlook your need for confession.

- vs. 4 - Conviction comes over the people. For followers of Jesus, conviction is a deep awareness of our sin and an awareness of our need for the forgiveness of God.
- vs. 5-15 serves as a model prayer of confession. Ezra doesn't give excuses or try to justify their sin. Not, "God you brought these people out here, and you knew they would be tempted. This is your fault." But, "God, we have sinned against you."
- vs. 5-6 - Ezra's prayer is corporate. This is NOT Ezra's sin, but he is humiliated by the sin, and he counts himself among the sinners. This is his people. Their sin affects him. His first instinct is not accusing the people but identifying with them. It's a corporate confession - sins of others affected Ezra and everyone else.
- vs. 7 - Ezra's prayer is a specific confession. Ezra names the exact sin and Israel's ongoing struggle with this sin and how it caused them to be handed over to their enemies. Not only is the confession specific, Ezra points out how long Israel has struggled.
- vs. 8-9 - Ezra's prayer focuses on God's grace. God was gracious to bring a remnant out of exile and brought them back to the land. The tragic response to grace was to turn back to sin.

- vs. 10-15 - Ezra's prayer makes no excuses. Nowhere in the prayer does Ezra explain away Israel's sin. He just confesses. While God had not forsaken His people, His people had forsaken Him time and time again. The prophets had warned them (vs. 11), but they did not listen.
- vs. 15 - Ezra confesses guilt and acknowledges God's holiness. In no way does Ezra make light of the sin, or justify it. Instead, Ezra trusts in the gracious character of God.
- None of us like to talk about sin, but the reality is that your sin is destructive. It destroys relationships, and your sins hinders your fellowship with God.
- If we know the destructive nature of sin, why is it so difficult to confess sin?
 - Pride - don't want to admit we're wrong.
 - Embarrassment - don't people to find out what we've done.
 - Fear of consequences - What if I tell my wife or my close brother in Christ my sin? What will they think or do?
 - Enjoyment of sin - We enjoy it too much to confess it.
 - Don't understand seriousness of sin - don't realize the damage it's doing to our own soul.
- But, healing in confession ([1 John 1:9](#), [James 5:16](#)). We can't be set free from sin we're not willing to confess. Unconfessed sin doesn't end your relationship with God, but it will hinder your fellowship with Him.
- These verses teach us:
- **Confession should be in light of God's grace.** God wants to heal you not condemn you. We confess sin because God has already shown incredible grace. Not because we hope He might forgive us but because He has already forgiven us at the cross.

- **Confession should be regular.** How often do you sin? As often as you sin, you need to confess. Confession of sin should be a regular part of your time with the Lord ([Psalm 139:23-24](#) is good to pray daily).
- **Confession should be specific.** Instead of “forgive me of all my sins...” God, forgive me of being impatient with my children. Or, forgive me of worrying about the future. Or, forgive me of gossiping about, etc.

Don't fail to repent of your sin.

- vs. 1-3 - Confession must lead to action. Chapter 10 describes repentance. Confession of sin led to action, and action is shocking to our ears! The men who had married pagan women divorced them and sent them away.
- In OT, God hated divorce ([Malachi 2:16](#)). In OT, divorce happened often, but the Law regulated it for serious causes ([Deuteronomy 24:1](#)). In [Mark 10:5](#), Jesus said that this command was given as a concession to hardness of hearts, but God's desire was for a man and woman to be one flesh for life. Jesus further states that divorce is allowable only in the case of adultery.
- Divorce does not reflect God's design, nor is divorce celebrated in [Ezra 10](#). [Ezra 10](#) is a unique situation in redemptive history and should in no way be viewed as a model for Christian marriages. If married to an unbeliever, this passage is NOT telling you to divorce your spouse. Rather, this chapter is about purifying Israel as God's chosen people from whom He will send the Messiah.
- It's a painful chapter. The people were not choosing between a good option and a bad option. They were dealing with the painful consequences of their sinful decisions that should have never been made in the first place.

- A reminder that the consequences of sin are real, and the consequences can linger for years.
- In [Ezra 10:5-17](#), the people gathered in Jerusalem confessing their sin and committing themselves to obedience. The weather was terrible. Many people were involved and each case was investigated individually. It took three months to investigate and resolve these cases ([Ezra 10:9, 16-17](#)). This wasn't a quick fix. It was a painful process of dealing with sin.
- Ezra ends with a list of names - names of those who were guilty. A number of them were spiritual leaders. Names recorded for future generations to see who failed. Names to hold people accountable for their actions. Names that also demonstrate people who actually repented of their sins. Ezra doesn't end merely with a list of sinners but with sinners who repented.
- It's a strange and heartbreaking chapter. It's hard to read of divorce and people being sent away.
- But, two observations. First, it didn't have to be this way. If the people would have walked faithfully with the Lord they would have avoided the heartache and devastation of sin. If they would have done things God's way, men would have married Israelite women and would have honored them and would have raised godly families.
- Second, the consequences of sin are absolutely devastating.
- Several lessons about repentance:
- **Repentance is a change of direction.** Repentance is not just acknowledge or merely confessing sin. Confession is agreeing with God about your sin. Repentance is turning away from it.
- **Repentance is costly.** It's not easy to repent, and repentance does not take away the consequences of sin. But, repentance does put you back

in the direction of following the Lord. While repentance is costly, it is far more costly to continue to walk in rebellion.

- **Repentance is ongoing.** If you're constantly confessing sin, then you need to be constantly turning from sin. We live a lifestyle of repentance, always turning to God and away from sinful desires.
- **Repentance requires accountability.** You need people around you pointing you to Jesus. You need a discipleship group that calls out sin in your life and holds you accountable for your walk with the Lord.
- This morning, what sin do you need to repent of? Confess and repent. Turn from your sin and commit to honoring God with your choices.
- In [Ezra 7](#), Ezra returned to Jerusalem to bring about spiritual reform, and instead, what happens is that the people turn back to their sinful ways.
- A reminder that Ezra, nor Zerubbabel, was not the Savior of Israel. Ezra exposed and confessed Israel's sin, but he couldn't remove it. Also a reminder that ultimately not even the Law could save the people. What the people of Israel needed was a change of heart, and that change of heart could only be brought about by the Messiah.
- Jesus is the One who has come to deal with our sin by living a perfect life in our place, going to the cross and taking the penalty of our sin upon Himself, rising from the dead proving that He is the God-man who has the power to give us life, and changing our hearts in such a way that we desire to live for the Lord.
- Ultimately, Jesus is the answer because only Jesus can set you free from your sin, and only Jesus can empower you to put sin to death.
- This morning, if you are not a follower of Jesus, the only way to escape the punishment you deserve for your sin is to turn to Jesus.

- If you are a follower of Jesus, and you've drifted, return. Return by running back to the grace of God in Jesus Christ, confessing your sin and turning back to Him by faith.