**The Mess We’ve Made: A Call to Repentance**

**Ezra 10 (ESV)**

July 24, 2022

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The chapter before us is a heavy one. So even though we gather and we have a celebration Sunday, there is a sense of heaviness. There is a weight to the message before us. We’ll take the time that God has allotted for us to consider this, to let it impress upon our hearts and then to go forward with joy and hope in Christ together.

***1*** *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.* ***2*** *And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, of the sons of Elam, addressed Ezra: “We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this.* ***3*** *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.* ***4*** *Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it.”* ***5*** *Then Ezra arose and made the leading priests and Levites and all Israel take an oath that they would do as had been said. So they took the oath.*

***6*** *Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the chamber of Jehohanan 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.* ***7*** *And a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem,* ***8*** *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.*

***9*** *Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within the three days. 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.* ***10*** *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.* ***11*** *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.”* ***12*** *Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, “It is so; we must do as you have said.* ***13*** *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.* ***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.”* ***15*** *Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite supported them.*

***16*** *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;* ***17*** *and by the first day of the first month they had come to the end of all the men who had married foreign women.*

***18*** *Now there were found some of the sons of the priests who had married foreign women: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah, some of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers.* ***19*** *They pledged themselves to put away their wives, and their guilt offering was a ram of the flock for their guilt.* ***20*** *Of the sons of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah.* ***21*** *Of the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uzziah.* ***22*** *Of the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah.*

***23*** *Of the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (that is, Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.* ***24*** *Of the singers: Eliashib. Of the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri.*

***25*** *And of Israel: of the sons of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malchijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Hashabiah, and Benaiah.* ***26*** *Of the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah.* ***27*** *Of the sons of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza.* ***28*** *Of the sons of Bebai were Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai.* ***29*** *Of the sons of Bani were Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth.* ***30*** *Of the sons of Pahath-moab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh.* ***31*** *Of the sons of Harim: Eliezer, Isshijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon,* ***32*** *Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah.* ***33*** *Of the sons of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei.* ***34*** *Of the sons of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel,* ***35*** *Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluhi,* ***36*** *Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib,* ***37*** *Mattaniah, Mattenai, Jaasu.* ***38*** *Of the sons of Binnui: Shimei,* ***39*** *Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah,* ***40*** *Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai,* ***41*** *Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah,* ***42*** *Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph.* ***43*** *Of the sons of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah.* ***44*** *All these had married foreign women, and some of the women had even borne children.*

Amy Purdy is a public speaker, a dance competition finalist, professional snowboarder and a winner of two back-to-back world cup gold medals. Such an amazing set of achievements makes it hard to believe that she accomplished those feats after suffering the loss of her spleen, her kidneys, and both of her legs. You can imagine that with someone as athletically driven as Amy, it would have required a very drastic problem for her family to consider any kind of organ removal or amputation. She was only nineteen. She felt sick at work. She went home early, thinking she had the flu. In less than 24 hours, she was at the hospital with a 2% chance of survival. It was just the subtlest of symptoms and then they discovered that bacterial meningitis began to affect her circulatory system through this infection that led to septic shock and a coma.

If you look it up online, the first two sentences on the CDC website say, “Bacterial meningitis is serious. Some people with the infection die and death can occur in as little as a few hours.” It took an emergency surgery along with an eventual kidney transplant from her father to save her life. Tiny bacteria silently spread and it so drastically threatened her life that measures as extreme as amputation, which before wouldn’t have even been imaginable, had suddenly become necessary. Serious problems require serious measures.

To be sure, bacterial meningitis, as invisible as it is to our eyes, is a very serious problem. But there is an even more serious, even less visible, even more devastating problem. It’s one that is within. That problem is our sin. It is a problem that infects, that corrupts, that destroys, that separates, that kills, that dooms everyone it infects not merely physically, emotionally and mentally, but also spiritually. You may be facing a business downturn. You may be facing a family issue. You may be facing a chronic sickness. I do not mean to minimize the suffering and difficulty of those challenges. But make no mistake. There is no more serious problem in your entire life than your sin! For the people of God, this is a critical lesson to remember.

They stood in the rain. They had had plenty of low points and points where they needed God’s help. They faced uncertainty. There was a giant move. They had tried to accomplish a building project. They had opposition legally and royal investigations. Yet this moment, along with all the other low points in Scripture, it deals with the most serious of problems that we face, which is our sin. Our sin pits us against the most serious problem anyone could face, which is God Himself. Threats from the outside are bad. There was Pharaoh, the Philistines, the persecution. But the worse threat to the people of God always comes from within.

It has only been a few months that Ezra has been present. There has been a moment of celebration, but he finds out that the people have been living in blatant, unrepentant sin by intermarrying with the women who are not followers of Yahweh. This is not an issue of ethnicity. This is an issue of fidelity to the faith. They had been marrying women who were not joining in following Yahweh. They were continuing on in the practices of following other gods. It was the very thing that had gotten them exiled from the land in the first place. Ezra is so upset that he not only tears his clothes, but he tears out his own hair. He doesn’t even know what to do when he looks at the mess. Have you ever felt like that? You look at the mess that you’ve made, the problem of your sin, and you say, “What do I do about this?” Perhaps not only you individually, but as you engage in a culture and a broader community and then especially, specifically in a church family, you realize there is a mess on our hands. What do we do?

This has been a series on revival. Revival begins with God’s Word calling us to repentance. Repentance is where we’re turning around. We have a change in mind because of what God said and then it produces a change in action, where God’s Word has cut through all of our hardness and has actually broken our heart. We learn that serious problems require serious measures. There are things in our lives that we have put before God. What He is trying to do to get our attention is to remind us that we are to put Him first. This is the call to repentance in the last chapter of Ezra. This call is a call that we’re to heed to put God first. How do we do that? What do we need to know or remember? We’ve had a lesson on repentance, but what can help us in this season of deep repentance? I believe there are some reminders that can help us from chapter 10. The first one is by looking at the devastation that sin wreaks among us and be reminded of

**#1 The Deep Grief We Need To Express (10:1)**

This is where repentance starts. It’s a conviction over the mess we’ve made through our sin against God. His Word, by the power of the Holy Spirit, shines a light on our sin and convicts us. Then we take time to lament the devastation that our sin has wrought. It’s a deep grief that we need to express. You can see it in verse 1. There is a godly sadness that both appreciates and then communicates before God the devastation that sin has brought. This is grief not over just sin generally, but specifically. Ezra is expressing deep grief over this specific sin made known to him in verse 1 of chapter 9.

You can see that chapter 9 is written in the first person. Ezra is describing what he had been told by the officials. If you look back at verse 1, the words should trigger your memory back to what Israel had done that had gotten them exiled. His grief was deep. He recognized that everything was at stake. The very thing that they had been trying to rebuild now was all about to be undone. It wasn’t just the fact that there was intermarriage, but it was what God had very clearly commanded them not to do because of where it would lead. If you look back at Deuteronomy, you can see His commands in

**Deuteronomy 7:3-4** You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.

That was the command. The anger of God is at stake and they needed the favor of God, which we have spent time discussing. But that’s exactly what they did. If you look at 2 Kings 17, you can look at verses 7-23 and you can see how Israel had sinned against Yahweh. They had walked in the customs of the nations around them and that they did secretly against Yahweh things that were not right and they were lured into worshiping other gods. They were sent prophets to warn them, but they were stubborn. They didn’t listen. They were not convicted by the Word of God. They resisted the Word of God. They abandoned His commandments and so,

**2 Kings 17:18** Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight. None was left but the tribe of Judah only.

They continued in these ways. You can read about it in 2 Chronicles 36. God in His compassion continued to warn them, but they persisted. They mocked the messengers of God, despised His Word, and scoffed at His prophets.

**Psalm 106:35-36** but they mixed with the nations and learned to do as they did. They served their idols, which became a snare to them.

How bad was that? Well, what they did is

**Psalm 106:37** They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons;

This is no flippant thing. This is dark and evil and it’s where these decisions were leading them in disobeying God. Because of that, Ezra tore his garment, tore his cloak and pulled out his hair. This is the grief that we see shown from the third person now in chapter 10. There is grief over the devastation that has been wrought by sin, where Ezra takes time to lament.

***1*** *While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God,*

When you think about deep grief, there are a few indicators of healthy grief that is being expressed. You kind of see it from two angles in this verse. You see it from a personal angle and then from the communal angle. First, grief shows through deep personal engagement. When we grieve, we should do so truly and profoundly. You can see Ezra is engaged first spiritually. You can see where he is looking. He is looking to God through prayer. This isn’t always where we go first when we experience grief. We tend to turn inward or look outward or even start to fall downward. But we don’t look upward to God in prayer. Ezra grieves upward.

He is engaged spiritually in prayer and he is engaged verbally. He is making confession. He is not just sort of in a meditative state and an emotion of feeling bad on its own. He is expressing and confessing the sins God’s Word has convicted him and the community of. He is speaking up. Ezra, like Nehemiah, like Daniel, confesses sin as a leader of God’s community. He understands what it is to be a part of a family and a community and that they’re affected by each other.

He is praying, making confession, and you can see he is engaged emotionally. It actually impacts how he feels. He opens up and he is weeping. Yes, he is weeping over sin that God would convict him of personally, but he is weeping over the sins of the community. Have you ever wept over the sins of the community? Have you wept over sins in your family? When you take time to lament over the devastation that has been wrought by the sin, there is deep grief that is expressed spiritually.

You see it verbally and emotionally. You see it physically. He is engaged. He is getting up, moving, and then throwing himself down. The future of the kingdom is at stake in such a way and his concern over God’s promises, His people and His glory hanging in the balance is so stark that he throws his personal dignity and sophistication to the wind and he is just throwing himself down and getting up and throwing himself down over and over. He is overcome.

You can see he is engaged geographically. He has gone before the house of God. He is there at the place where he knows God is to be sought. He is not taking this lightly. He is engaged in every way that he can be. He is grieving personally. Authentic, healthy grief, just like authentic laughter, can be contagious. We see that this grief is in a sense, being taught and learned by the community as they watch and understand and start to appreciate actually what has occurred. This includes not only Ezra, but here now the community. This grief shows through deep communal involvement. It’s not just personal, but it’s communal. You can see here that it includes the full family of God.

*a very great assembly of men, women, and children, gathered to him out of Israel,*

Everyone is impacted. The full family is included. There is a focus on the actual family of God. This isn’t just general peoples in the land. No, these are the families out of Israel. These are the people who belong to Yahweh of this community. They’re joining together to experience true family. True family means when there is something to grieve, we grieve together. You can see here it says

*for the people wept bitterly.*

That’s one of the harder lessons about life. Sometimes what it means to experience true family and true community is it means we rejoice together. We celebrate. Then sometimes it means that together we weep. There is personal engagement and communal involvement. If we’re going to take God’s call to repentance and to put Him first and heed that, we need to take time to lament the devastation that sin wreaks among us. You could say it like this. The mess that we’ve made should make us a mess.

The devastation that sin brings is all throughout Scripture. From the beginning and throughout, you can see the brokenness of each family, from the very first family and on, and how it destroys. You can see it in the people of God time and time again. You see a family of brother against brother, of husband against wife, of parent against child, child against parent. You see it over and over amidst cities that are destroyed and nations that are overcome. You see the people of God called to be different, yet they succumb again and again until they are exiled. We see that in the book of Lamentations where the prophet grieves so deeply over all this devastation. The Bible teaches us how to lament and the psalms are filled with this. Now after the return, Ezra comes and finds himself again face to face with this terror and the devastation of sin.

This is a devastation that would later be experienced and then grieved over by God Himself. He came as a man. Jesus, walking amongst His people would see their suffering. He would see their disease in a personal way. He would see the demonic, the religious, the political oppression. Then He would even experience their persistent rejection of Him as God. You can see Him weep even over the death of His friend and the sisters’ grief in John 11. He goes and there is such despair and lament. He just recognizes what sin has done to everybody, to the people and His creatures that He loves.

**John 11:33** When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.

Then Jesus wept. You can see Him in Matthew 23 confronting the hardhearted religious leaders of His people and just being exasperated and moved to grief. He says

**Matthew 23:37-39** “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’ ”

It’s the same spirit of grief Zechariah prophesies will be graciously given to God’s people. One day they will see the devastation that they have wrought. He says that

**Zechariah 12:10** “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

Our sin and the devastation it brings ultimately is not merely just what we see around us, but it comes at the cost of God’s very own Son. In Jesus’ betrayal, we even see the bitter tears of Peter as he realizes his failure to follow through in his friend’s moment of need. But even in all of those bitter tears and in the lament, it was Peter and all those like him for whom Jesus died. You see, after Jesus rose again having paid for the cost of our sin, this very same Peter was filled with God’s Spirit and he was called out for a specific purpose. He went and he called God’s people to repent. The same spirit of grief was expressed to these people and they were cut to the heart and brought into the family of God. This same sort of godly grief James calls sinners to express and Paul calls the Corinthians to express and Jesus encourages the church at Laodicea to embrace.

**James 4:8-10** Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Paul knows that there is a place for grief and he describes it in 2 Corinthians 7. In Revelation, Jesus says this.

**Revelation 3:19** Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

There is a place of love even as we lament and even as we grieve over these things. It is right to grieve. It is right to recognize that there are couples we know who can no longer talk. There are children we know who no longer have a home. There are calls that we can no longer make. There are greetings we can no longer give. There is laughter we can no longer share. There are friendships we can no longer celebrate. For some, there is reputation that we no longer enjoy. There are seats often in this room that are no longer filled. The grief over the devastation of sin should be deep. There are marriages broken. There are sins of anger, sins of drunkenness, sins of pornography covered and continued in week after week after week. There is slander spread, bitterness settled, grumbling and defiance. These and so many more bring devastation. In view of such things, it is right to take time to lament. We have the family here and it’s right to understand that this is a precious time. It’s not exactly a family member’s meeting, so there is a limit to what we discuss in this context, but it’s right to grieve together.

As we do though, we grieve upward in prayer and then we grieve in a way that we would confess and speak verbally. It’s to not merely think or whisper things or talk with others, but to talk with God in a way that we would open up our hearts before God and that we would physically engage and then be a part of the assembly. Then to recognize in the end that these kinds of tears wept over our sin, that they can actually be wiped by God because He is the very one who has wiped away the stains made by our sin. Every tear wept is not wasted. Psalm 56 has such a precious promise. The psalmist says

**Psalm 56:8** You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle.

Our tears can be tears of worship. We don’t have to be afraid to face or confess our sin because we never grieve without hope. Sometimes in the pain of grief, it’s sort of like a limb that has been asleep and it starts to tingle back awake. We feel the pain of that, but it’s also an indication that there is life. Here is

**#2 The Real Hope We Can Claim (10:2-4)**

God doesn’t leave us in grief or leave us in lamentation. This is what repentance believes. Despite the mess we’ve made, there is still hope that God wants us to return to Him. We can take comfort in the restoration that God desires. This is a real hope we can claim. It’s a confident belief that we’re not beyond help and that God desires restoration. You see here in verses 2-4, this individual named Shecaniah.

***2*** *And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, of the sons of Elam, addressed Ezra: “We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this.*

If we’re going to heed God’s call to repentance and we’re going to put Him first, we can still take comfort in the restoration He desires and claim this hope even in the midst of the mess we’ve made. Hope is so precious. It empowers us actually in a special way that we would never be otherwise. Look at what hope empowers here in Shecaniah. You can see that hope empowers you to be courageous.

***2*** *And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, of the sons of Elam,*

If you look down in verse 26, we see one of the very few things we know about Shecaniah, which is that the sin Ezra is lamenting involves members of his own clan. It looks like there are six, as well as quite possibly in verse 21, his own father. That would require some courage to speak up when your own father is engaged in this. You might think such a close connection to the situation would cause him to shrink back in fear, but he has hope and so he has courage. This hope empowers him not only to have courage, but to be candid. It’s to be honest, direct, clear about the problem and the solution. He can be candid about the sin. He is very clear about what has happened.

*“We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women*

He understands that this is a problem, but he’s not afraid to be candid because he has a grasp of God’s mercy. He says

*but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this.*

It’s possible that the prayers of Ezra have triggered for him reminders of past occasions of sin from God’s people whereby He has delivered them in mercy. You can call to mind when Moses prayed or Elijah or Jeremiah or Daniel, and now Ezra. You can see there is hope. So he is candid about the problem and then he also is constructive. This hope empowers him to be constructive. He is not just sort of complaining or pointing the finger. He actually offers a constructive idea or solution to move forward. He says there is hope. The statement “even now there is hope” is similar in Hebrew to what he says in verse 3.

***3*** *Therefore let us make a covenant with our God*

Let’s do something about this!

*to put away all these wives and their children,*

So he offers not merely a statement of condemnation and not just a vague optimism, but he offers constructive definitive steps of repentance. We can actually go to God. He wants us to go to Him. Shecaniah is proposing now a very serious and drastic action. He recommends the men of Israel put away or send away or cause to go out, is the Hebrew. Remember, this is not about ethnicity. This is about idolatry. So these are not the women who have assimilated into Israel. These are not the women who have said, “I want to be a follower of Yahweh.” These are the ones who have said, “I’m not going to do that. Let’s just continue on, but I’ll worship my God.” It’s clear that when people chose to follow Yahweh, that they were welcomed. This happened many times in the Old Testament. But these were remaining worshipers of pagan deities and they were a great danger. Shecaniah said we need to take action. This is a crisis!

There are some questions that would arise based on his suggestion. We’ll try to get to them later on. But right now, just note that he has hope that is driving him to try to be constructive, to try to move forward. “I think that there is a way forward that we can address this issue.” He is holding onto the promises and the character of God and His mercy that had happened so many times in the past when God had been merciful when they had revived and submitted to God’s direction through His leader and His Word.

*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.*

Shecaniah is not trembling before any man, even his own family, even his father. He trembles before the Word of God, just like Isaiah 66 would describe. God says

**Isaiah 66:2** …But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

Because of this, he actually is empowered to be compelling. He is not only courageous and candid about this. He is constructive about what to do and he is very compelling. He says

***4*** *Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it.”*

He is ready to move. He is declaring responsibility. This belongs to Ezra, but he is also declaring his support. He makes a compelling call that is going to have an impact and spark God’s man to make a move. Shecaniah would almost be a nobody, but he has hope. Because of his hope, he is so critical. If we’re going to heed God’s call to repentance and put Him first, then we need to remember the mess we’ve made is not beyond hope. It is not beyond hope! Hope is this thing that God gives. It’s the fact that God would want restoration. It’s one of the hardest things to believe, but it’s one of the things that God gave the most to prove. We sang it in the song earlier.

**Romans 8:32** He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

God has proven that He desires that restoration. He has made it possible. He offered Jesus to die in our place. He is the sacrifice that brings us hope. The power of His resurrection ensures that hope. It’s what our comfort is. So when Paul talks to the church in Thessalonica, he is able to tell them to walk after Jesus. He is calling them to walk in holiness to try to please God. But he also reminds them, even as we would grieve if someone passes away, our hope ultimately is not here. Our hope is upward. It’s with Jesus. We don’t grieve without hope. He will return and He will raise all those who trust in Him. We can encourage each other with these words and how much we need hope. We can be a people bringing hope and encouraging one another. We need it so badly. Sometimes we feel like things are so wrong. Maybe you’re in a sin right now. Nobody knows about it, but you are in deep. You’re thinking, “I’ve blown it and the mess I’ve made is too big.” Listen to the words of God.

***2*** *…but even now there is hope*

Maybe you’re suffering as a result of someone else’s sin or just chronic sickness or you’re trying to provide care giving. Whatever it is, it’s a fallen world and you’re thinking, “I think I’m going to give up. I don’t know what to do.” Listen to the words of God. Even now there is hope. Maybe you’re a spouse and you’re wondering, “Could I ever be restored to God?” Even now there is hope. Maybe you’re a parent and you’re thinking about your child. You’re praying and you’re losing heart in prayer after all that has happened. Even now there is hope. Maybe you’re beyond some of those prime years of life and you think “All of my best years of God are behind me.” Even now there is hope. That hope is not just a vague sentiment, though. It’s one that moves with faith-filled action. Here we see

**#3 The Radical Measures We Must Embrace (10:5-43)**

It’s that we would take steps to make things right through the commitments we make. This is what repentance involves. It’s to try to address the mess we’ve made through radical measures.

Salvation is a gift of grace. We don’t earn our way to heaven. We don’t earn our way into God’s favor. It’s a gift that is given. We receive it by faith. Jesus is the great gift of God. These actions and repentance and taking drastic measures are not things that people do to be saved, but you can be sure that they are things saved people do. We don’t take radical measures to make things right to become God’s people. But we do take radical measures to make things right because we are God’s people. Faith and repentance actually go hand in hand and they continue on in the Christian life.

Spurgeon said, “Perhaps you have the notion that repentance is a thing that happens at the commencement of the spiritual life, and has to be got through as one undergoes a certain operation, and there is an end of it. If so, you are greatly mistaken; repentance lives as long as faith. Towards faith I might almost call it a Siamese twin. We shall need to believe and to repent as long as ever we live.”

Repentance is one of those things that continues on. For some of the measures in understanding what is going on, here are a few important realities that help us in this. First is that we would take seriously the standards of God.

***5*** *Then Ezra arose and made the leading priests and Levites and all Israel take an oath that they would do as had been said. So they took the oath.*

Ezra has set the standard of God and he is calling them to it. He is holding them to it and he tells them to take it seriously. In preparation for the discussion, they understand what needs to happen, so they make the oath. You see the standards of God that Ezra understands and that he feels the weight of. He feels it so much so that he is overwhelmed with grief.

***6*** *Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the chamber of Jehohanan 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.*

This is a total fast, like Moses did when he interceded for Israel after the golden calf. He understands what is at stake. He has a lack of appetite. After someone tells you that everyone has to put away their wives and we’re going to have to break up some families and this is the task, you can imagine why he wouldn’t have an appetite. You can imagine why he felt overwhelmed. In fact, this is what Paul talks to Timothy about in 1 Timothy chapter 5 when he talks about

**1 Timothy 5:19–20** Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.

It’s a sober call to the standards of God. Then you can look a few verses down in

**1 Timothy 5:23** (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.)

You can see Paul understanding “I know that this might cause you to have some problems because you’re going to feel how heavy this is.” It’s what is going on in Ezra. He is mourning and lamenting and understands what is at stake are the standards of God. But he also takes seriously the stakes of disobedience.

***7*** *And a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem,* ***8*** *and that if anyone did not come within three days,*

They’re within about forty or fifty miles or so. So when they hear the news, with three days, they would have enough time to come. It was urgent! If they didn’t come, then they would find themselves

*by order of the officials and the elders all his property should be forfeited, and he himself banned from the congregation of the exiles.*

There are serious consequences issued. That word for forfeited is literally the word devoted or put under the ban, which is the word that was used in Joshua. When Israel was coming and conquering the land and when they were not to take from the spoils of the land, things were under the ban. They would be given to God. They would be either destroyed or put in the temple. They weren’t for personal use. It seems like Ezra is recognizing and the elders understand that this is so serious, it’s reminding them of that time when someone took from the ban. They remember the time of Achan. They remember the time when the whole nation suffered and when dozens of men died in war because of this one man’s disobedience and Achan himself was destroyed. This is the intensity, the consequences, the stakes of disobedience. So they come and the people understand and they gather within the three days.

***9*** *Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within the three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month.*

It’s less than five months after his arrival and he has this tough meeting at the beginning.

*And all the people sat in the open square before the house of God,*

It’s this large square and there are many thousands of people there gathered and listening. They are

*trembling because of this matter and because of the heavy rain.*

This heavy rain, you can imagine, is dreary. They’re shivering from this idea of God’s punishment and the winter rain, but it’s not just that. There is sort of a mixture in this rain. If you read back in Deuteronomy 11, you can read the warning that God gives that there is a blessing in this land. In fact, for their culture in the desert, rain was a blessing. They needed that for food. Rain was the gift of God and he talks about that and describes that God will give you rain. It’s His favor. But he says

**Deuteronomy 11:16-17** Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain,

You see here this moment where they’re feeling the rain and they are trembling. But at least they have a sense of God’s favor and that they have experienced that. Ezra has prayed and sought God, but they understand this is what is at stake. God could shut the rains off like this (snaps fingers). This is a cold rain. This is probably in the month of December in Israel. Jerusalem can get down to the 40’s or 50’s. It’s cold. They’re shivering in the rain. It’s heavy in a sense, but it’s also hopeful. There is still hope. There is still time, but we need to act. So they take seriously these stakes. Then they take seriously the steps of repentance. You can see the charge that Ezra makes.

***10*** *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.*

You can also see the counsel that Ezra makes.

***11*** *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.”*

The word there for confession is actually the same very unique word used in Joshua 7 with Achan. Give glory to God. Give praise to God or make confession. This is a matter that you need to bring to God. Separate yourselves.

Now there is a controversy about this passage that we don’t have time to get into, but there are basically two different views. One view would be that Shecaniah and Ezra were sort of proposing a human solution that was a bit excessive and not really condoned by God. The other view would be that Ezra and Shecaniah are trying to honor God’s direction and take things seriously the way that God would direct. There are a whole bunch of questions that arise about marriage and divorce, which do merit discussion. They merit more discussion than we can have in a meeting like this. But I think there is enough reason to believe that this was an earnest seeking of God with faithful prayer and faithful desire to put themselves under God’s Word and they were taking action that the Holy Spirit was directing. It’s a very sobering thing, a very serious thing.

You can imagine the women or even the children pleading not to be put away. That’s one perspective. But you can also imagine the people pleading that the women and children would turn away from their foreign gods to Yahweh and to turn and to repent. There is an understanding of sort of the due process that needs to happen. This isn’t just a flippant thing. The people understand and recognize the seriousness of this. They recognize that they can’t put anything before God. They understand the heart of God that Jesus conveys later on.

**Mark 9:43** And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.

Later on, He says

**Matthew 10:37** Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

You have to put Him first and call others to follow. Don’t let anything get between you and Jesus. The people understand the seriousness that is called for here. They understand that idolatry is at stake. But they also take seriously the specifics of obedience.

***12*** *Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, “It is so; we must do as you have said.*

They understand and they want to act, but they also recognize

***13*** *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.*

This is a big problem. We need time and we need to take this seriously. So they make a proposal.

***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.”*

The proposal is that they will take the time it takes to go through this matter one by one. Now, there is a minority dissent. There are a couple of individuals who oppose this.

***15*** *Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite supported them.*

There is a bit of a question there on the Hebrew, but it looks like they oppose maybe not just the proposal of the people, but the entire course of action. It’s hard to imagine that there wouldn’t be some people opposed to this. This is a very drastic and serious thing. That’s almost always the case with community discipline. But if you look at the names and you see Meshullam, you can look down in verse 29. Even though there were a number of men named Meshullam, it’s quite possible that this is the one who also had participated in this. The people are already united, but unity is not the same thing as unanimity. It’s not the same thing as everybody agreeing. But there is a consensus agreement in a way that honors the Lord and they decide to move forward. The decision is made and they’re going to work through the specifics.

***16*** *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;* ***17*** *and by the first day of the first month they had come to the end of all the men who had married foreign women.*

They select specific men. They sort of have a committee. They sit down. It takes several months to work through and examine the matter. You can see they have worked through the process and the committee moves through careful work. But on the whole, in the rest of the verses, you can see the need to take seriously the scale of the consequences to see how far it has gone.

Now, depending on how you count the names, you come out with about a little over one hundred individuals who had engaged in this. Some have calculated that there were about thirty thousand Israelites there, so you’re looking at about half of one percent. But very clearly, we understand the principle that God has given then and now. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. Achan was one man out of many. But we see that one hundred eleven people is one hundred eleven people too many. This is a serious thing. What they do, what their hope is they come forward and you realize that it has affected everybody. It has affected priests and those who were leading worship and those who were working in the temple and the people and the laity. All the people had engaged at every level.

 ***19*** *They pledged themselves to put away their wives, and their guilt offering was a ram of the flock for their guilt.*

They put forward a sacrifice ultimately having to trust in what God had provided and say, we are in the merciful hands of God, which is the safest place to be. Here, a record is given. In a lot of places, we have halls of fame. But here is sort of a wall of shame. The leaders are listed first. You just see the names there in the book that will last. This is a serious consequence and we see the scope, the scale of what has happened, of these consequences. In one sense, there is a seriousness of it. But there is also a blessing because we see that sin always has consequences, but there is also the mercy of God and Jesus has the scars to prove it.

What radical measures do we need to take? What in your life do you need to give back to God? What is before Him? Are there hobbies that you need to stop or relationships that you need to restore? Are there sites or places that you need to stop visiting? Is there help that you need to seek? It may be a shock to your spouse or to your kids. It might be a shock to your friends or your parents. You might think “It’s not that big a deal. I’m young. I still have time.” It might be a shock to someone that you’re dating. Maybe you would say “It’s too late. I’ve been holding onto this for too long in my life.” Look! This is what God’s people do. Repentance should be a normal part of what it means to follow Jesus together. It’s taking radical steps to try to make it right. Things might take longer than we like. It’s harder and it’s messier. But praise God that there are some doing those kinds of things here. I can testify to people taking radical measures. Praise God for the gift that is to our body. The last thing is

**#4 The Utter Desperation We Will Experience (10:44)**

***44*** *All these had married foreign women, and some of the women had even borne children.*

The sense is felt throughout the chapter, but it’s sort of the loudest here. It’s just taking to heart the grace that we require. We see how far this stuff has spread. We see how basic the problem was and we see how deep it went. Now it’s so complex that there are children involved. This is a big mess. We need God’s grace! We need His grace to not only address this mess and then to walk through it, we need His grace to help us in what He is calling us into.

I know some of you are desperate. Some of you feel desperate and you feel so weak and inferior, like you’re too desperate to even help the body. But, you are serving as the most powerful anchors in our midst. When you’re desperate for God’s grace, you sense your need. You feel the weight of the complex consequences because of your sin and others’ sin. We will never move beyond our need for God’s grace, but praise God that we can never outrun the reach of His supply. Your desperation in praying for God is exactly where we all need to be.

There are a lot of pastors or preachers who will preach through the book of Ezra and use it sort of as this book of how to get the right formula and be a good leader and accomplish what you need. Here at the very end of this book which goes together with Nehemiah, but at the end, it’s sort of like peeling back the wall of a building or a home that you’ve invested so much into and you just realize there are termites all inside. It’s worse than you could have imagined. This is the story of mankind. It’s the story of life. It’s the story of Ezra. It’s our story. This is not a formula for success, like, if we were only as good as Ezra, if we did it the right way, had the right heart, God would guarantee success with all of the things that we’re trying to do as a church or as a people. But this reminds us exactly why that’s not helpful. Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world. It’s not us saying my kingdom come. It’s us saying “thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Until that happens, for every new beginning there is sort of the same old end. It’s not the kind of happily ever after we prefer, but it gets worse.

If you read through Nehemiah, you find that it ends also on a minor key. This same issue is revisited and there is failure. But that’s what life is like, isn’t it? Our temporary successes will be temporary at best. This is not a book about bending the hard world of reality to your will. It’s understanding that the hard world of reality cannot escape God’s will. We need to labor for the things that last. Serious problems require serious measures. We heed God’s reviving call to repentance and put Him first. We trust Jesus to make our best life not now, but next. So even though sin has the last word of this chapter, it’s not the last words of this story, which are not happily ever after, but “Come Lord Jesus.” The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all.