

EZRA'S PRAYER FOR REVIVAL
Ezra 9

Intro: This chapter gives us a new lesson in revivals because this is a prayer for a revival while a revival was going on.

What was the revival that was in process?

Several things can be pointed out:

- 1) The Lord had brought His people back to the land after years of captivity.
- 2) The temple had been re-built.
- 3) Prophets again were ministering--Haggai and Zechariah.
- 4) There was a movement of the Lord in the hearts of the people. The people were worshipping the Lord, bringing their gifts, responding to the teaching of Ezra, rejoicing in the Lord.
- 5) The Lord had moved upon the hearts of Cyrus and Darius to make all of this possible.

It was one of the greatest periods in Israel's history, and seemed to point to even greater days ahead.

But then the princes of Israel came with bad news. Let us call this . . .

I. THE TORMENT OF THE PRINCES (Ezra 9:1, 2).

Obviously they were in great distress. They were troubled by what was going on among the people--even some of the leaders had been the worst offenders.

What was wrong?

It was this: Many of the people were in violation of the word of God because they had married women of the land whom the Lord had specifically said that they were not to marry. Cf. Deut. 7:1-11. See also Deut. 12:29-32.

There had been a most serious breakdown in a matter which was of the utmost importance to the Lord--the separation of His people from the world.

It can seem so reasonable, and even profitable, at times. But it is sinful in God's sight, and cannot be justified in any way!

Note that this is taught also in the NT. Cf. Rom. 12:1, 2; 2 Cor. 6:11-7:1.

In Isa. 55:8, 9 the Lord has clearly told us that His ways and His thoughts are completely different from ours, and yet the people of Israel, and the church also, have been notor-

ious in seeking to follow the ways of the world.

Cf. 1 John 2:15-17.

This is probably the greatest area where the church needed to be revived today. There is an almost complete breakdown in the lines of separation which God has established between His people and the world. Think of psychology, pleasures, boasting, financial policies, music, and on and on!

Now, before I proceed with the text, let me point out a very obvious fact from our text:

II. THE TREND OF THE LORD'S WORK.

It is seen here in vv. 1-3. It is usually downward spiritually, and away from the Lord.

You can see that all through Scripture.

I have been noticing this as I have been reading again through the book of Acts. After the Lord went back to heaven, things went wonderfully well for a time--but not for long! Examine the Epistles of the NT if you want an idea as to how things were going.

Think of the exodus from the land of Egypt in the OT. How long did things go well? Just until the people got to the Red Sea.

Gary startled me a short time ago when he said something to me about Trinity Bible Church, a deduction that he had made from his study of church history. I forget the number of years that he mentioned, possibly 50, more or less. But he said this: "It may be only a matter of time until the Gospel of Jesus Christ will be denied from the pulpit of Trinity Bible Church!"

Could that be? Already you can see things going on in some of our Bible churches which would have been thought impossible just a few years ago. Would you have thought that Bible churches would have rock bands, following the drug culture in its music? And yet that has happened?

We have followed the world in its ways of raising money until people now stay away from church because they do not want to get put on the spot for a donation or a pledge!

Oh, how careful we need to be! How we need to be guided by the Word of God, and not be whatever may be popular among church leaders. If a practice is not sanctioned by the Word of God, it makes no difference how many or who may be

in favor of certain things, it is wrong! Let us be true to the Word, not only in what we preach, but in what we practice, in the way we live and carry on the work of the Lord.

But back to our text. What followed the sad report of the princes?

After being made aware of THE TRESPASS OF THE PEOPLE, what did Ezra do? (Note that what the people had done is called a trespass [sin] in v.2, and again in v. 4.)

III. THE TREMBLING OF EZRA (Ezra 9:4-15).

See v. 4. (Read.)

Why did he tremble? Why was he astonished, or appalled?

It was for two reasons:

- 1) Because he feared the Lord.
- 2) Because he was amazed that the people of God could be so disobedient to the Lord.

EZRA WAS LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE DEPRAVITY OF THE HUMAN HEART, EVEN OF THE HEARTS OF THE LORD'S PEOPLE. This is the reason that the trend of the Lord's work is always downward.

But now let us notice the three ways in which Ezra's trembling was demonstrated:

A. He trembled at the Word of God. See v. 4.

Has this ever happened to you?

B. He trembled before the Lord. See v. 5.

Even in those days it was the Word which led to the Lord.

Finally,

C. He trembled in prayer. See vv. 6-15.

His prayer is recorded for us. Notice what it contained.

1. Confession (vv. 6, 7).

Ezra's words remind me of a hymn which is in our hymnal--#464.

I first heard this hymn when I was a university student years ago, and sang it from the Inter-Varsity hymnal. The IV hymnal included one verse which is not in our hymnal. Listen to it:

My sins, my sins, my Saviour!
 How sad on Thee they fall;
 Seen through thy gentle patience,
 I tenfold feel them all;
 I know they are forgiven,
 But still, their pain to me
 Is all the grief and anguish
 They laid, my Lord, on Thee.

We are so afraid to talk about sin in these days because we are afraid that people will be upset, perhaps mentally disturbed. Let me say that if people are living in sin, they need to be disturbed. In fact, if you would look carefully into the lives of many people who are having mental problems, you would find that the cause is S-I-N! And yet our psychologists and counsellors spend a good share of their time trying to explain sin away!

After Ezra confessed, what did he do?

2. Thanksgiving (vv. 8, 9).

Notice the things that he was thankful for.

And then . . .

3. More confession (vv. 10-13).

Notice how he quoted the Word in his prayer.

4. His justification of God (vv. 14, 15).

Psa. 51:4 Let us remember that God is never wrong. We might feel that our ideas are better, but the Word of God is always true. We go wrong when we depart from it, and we will bring the judgment of the Lord upon us.

But there is one other point that I want to make from four verses in this chapter, a point which will give us encouragement to turn to the Lord and to confess our sins. It has to do with . .

IV. THE TENDERNESS OF THE LORD.

A. In what He had already done for them in spite of their sins (vv. 8, 9).

B. The Lord had not punished them as their sins deserved; instead He had blessed them (v. 13).

Cf. Psa. 103:10; 130:3.

Where would we be today if God gave us what we deserved?

Let us also remember that present blessings do not mean that all is well in our lives before the Lord. It is the Word that will enlighten us concerning sin.

C. The Lord had not sent them back into captivity (v. 15).

Concl: The last chapter of Ezra tells how this problem was resolved at that time. God gave a revival within a revival.

But the question that faces us today is, How does this apply to us? Is there some restlessness in your heart because we here at Trinity are not doing what a lot of other churches are doing? Do you feel that we can be too literal in our interpretation of the Word of God? Do you think that we would have a greater influence upon the world if we would compromise a little bit with the world, like trying to make unregenerate people feel more at home by using music that they are more accustomed to?

What about your own life? Is it characterized by conformity to the Word, or by conformity to the world? Are your standards dictated by the world, or by the Lord? What do you look at on television? Have you gone back to the movies in a day when there is really no true censorship? I remember how disturbed I got when my pastor preached against the world, and against things that I was doing. But I also know that the Lord never meant very much to me until I really sought to live separated from the world AND separated unto Him.

Perhaps this is where we need a revival today--a revival of living according to the Lord's Word, as a people sanctified, set apart, concerned most of all about obedience to the Lord and bringing glory to the Lord.

May the Spirit of God search our hearts, and may we confess our sins that the blessings of God may be poured out upon us in a revival the likes of which we have never seen. He has not chosen us to be like the world, but to be distinctively different.