

# The Nature and Necessity of Repentance

*Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*

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I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to the ninth chapter of Ezra, Ezra 9. I think we've come to I think will be the last two messages on the book of Ezra, today and next week, under one title. Chapter 9 and 10 really do form a block and the title of the message is "The Nature and Necessity of Repentance." The nature and necessity of repentance. We're not gonna see the word "repent," it actually doesn't occur in the passage but I think what you have, we have a picture. You know, a picture is worth 1,000 words. We have a picture of repentance in the lives of the people of God in these two chapters and it really shouldn't be surprising because we talked last week about, the title of the message last time was "Marks of Spiritual Awakening." We looked at three marks of spiritual awakening and we saw that in the ministry of Ezra to the people of Israel in Jerusalem, that the Spirit of God begins to move and to work in an extraordinary way in their lives and it brings about the Spirit because of the preaching of the word now, Ezra has brought back the word of God, the second group of exiles returning from Babylon back to Judah and coming and finding the first group there and Ezra leading this second group, the second return. He's a scribe who's skilled in the law of Moses, handles the word of God, and so he preaches the word and the preaching of the word brings about deep conviction. It brings about a radical new way of seeing things. We saw last time that they were, when you have this radical new enlightening that comes from the word of God, that light brings that the word brings comes into the soul, then we then are afraid of what we should be afraid of, God and his holiness, and appalled at what we should be appalled at, our sin, and amazed at what we should be amazed at, his grace, and this awakening, the necessary fruit of that kind of real move of the Spirit is repentance which is illustrated for us in the remainder of the passage. Real conviction of sin which comes from the movement of God in the heart, in the life, among God's people leads to repentance.

Repentance, one of the key concepts in all of Scripture. Repentance is from Genesis to Revelation is a key aspect of what it means to be saved. It's a part of conversion, that conversion is a two-sided coin. It's how we respond to the proclamation of the Gospel, to the offer of Christ to the truth, to conviction of sin and then the realization that Jesus is able to save. How do you respond? Conversion is repentance plus faith, two sides of one coin. You turn from sin and you trust in Christ and it's really two aspects of one reality. Conversion. And so repentance is a part of salvation. Always has been, always will be.

There are some people, many people today in evangelical circles who say that repentance has been dispensed with. It's kind of a hyper-dispensationalism that is malignant, harmful, hurtful to your spiritual health and well-being. Repentance is to be a part of the true Christian life.

In fact, Martin Luther made this point in his 95 theses. Remember the statements of protest that he posted to the castle church, the door of the castle church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. That was the spark that ignited the Protestant Reformation. The first of his 95 theses, statements of protest was that repentance not penance but repentance is to be a part of the Christian life every moment of every day. It was essentially the idea he's getting at in the first element of protest, and repentance is a doctrine that is throughout the Scriptures.

The word "shub," the Old Testament word which means "to turn." What does it mean to repent? Well, the first word in the Old Testament is the word "turn." It means "to turn; to return; to turn back." The New Testament word when you see "repent" in the New Testament, it's usually the word "metanoia," and it means "a change of mind." And so repentance is really a change of mind that leads to a change of heart, that leads to a change of direction. The Old Testament word "to turn or to return, to turn back." A change of mind that leads to a change of heart and a change of direction and a change of life. Thus a change of life. So Genesis to Revelation you find the word "repent" a number of times in the book of Revelation itself. Of those seven letters to the churches that Jesus speaks to the churches, the seven churches of Revelation, repent is a dominant call of the risen glorified Christ to his people. Repent. It's to be a part of our lives.

The nature and necessity of repentance. We're gonna look this morning at really an illustration of it in the lives of the people. They are awakened by the preaching of the word. They see the horror of their sin. They're appalled at themselves and what do they do, and what we see is they repent and I think there's at least three, right now I think there's three steps that we see. By next week I might have a fourth, but it's at least three. We're gonna look at the first two, Lord willing, this morning and a third next week, Lord willing.

So the necessity and nature of repentance or the nature and necessity of repentance, and what I want to share with you for a moment before we look into it, is how is this going to apply to our lives. If repentance is supposed to be a part of our regular lives and especially when the Lord is dealing with an issue, when he exposes sin like he did for these people, suddenly they didn't think they had any problems, Ezra comes, preaches the word, they didn't come expecting that they had any issues, the word of God convicts them and confronts them and exposes their sin. Now what do you do with that? You repent and this is what they do. We're gonna see it in at least three steps, but it's a part of salvation. It's an essential part of conversion. As I said, conversion is repentance and faith and here we're looking at that side of the coin repentance. And what I want to point out to you as we read the passage, I want you to look at how active Ezra and the people are; that repentance is not a passive reality, it's not a let go and let God. That's not repentance.

Now it is true that repentance is a work of grace. You cannot repent apart from the grace of God. You cannot repent unless you have been born again. You cannot repent unless the grace of God helps you and works in you. But that said, the Bible calls us to actively repent, not to passively repent. Not to say things like, "Lord, if I'm gonna repent, You must make me do it." No. The way of repentance and the way of faith in the same way is faith, belief. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Repent and be baptized. Remember at Peter's preaching at Pentecost, the first great sermon preached as the Spirit falls upon the church, Peter preaches and he presents Christ to them and he shows them how they have rejected God's Messiah and they're cut to the heart and they cry out, "What must we do to be saved?" What does Peter say? He says, "Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins. Repent and be baptized. Turn. Actively turn from your sin. Actively change your mind, change your heart, change your direction."

So repentance strictly speaking is actually a synergism. It is both a divine work and a human work. Synergism is from two Greek words: syn which means together or with, s-y-n pronounced soon in Greek, we say sin, synergism; and then ergo is the word work. Soon syn plus work. Together plus work. Work together. Synergism is two persons working together. So when we say a divine human synergism, God and man are at work, both at work actively in the working of that reality.

Faith is a synergism. God must grant you faith. God must work by his Spirit to open your eyes but you must actively believe and place your trust in Christ. That's why Jesus commands you to believe. That's why Peter commands you to repent, the same thing. It is an active work. So when the Lord shows us in our lives, he awakens us by his Spirit through his word to the reality of our sin, we need to actively repent. And like I said, as we read the text, watch for the actions, the demonstrable actions of Ezra and the people of God.

I want to begin reading at verse 1 of chapter 9 and read through verse 4 of chapter 10. As we read these 19 verses, look at the action that the word of God prompts and the people engage in under Ezra's leadership. He's the one that acts and then they act. Ezra 9:1,

1 Now 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 Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites. 2 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 lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness." 3 When I heard about this matter, I tore my garment and my robe, and pulled some of the hair from my head and my beard, and sat down appalled. 4 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. 5 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; 6 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. 7 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 lands, to the sword, to captivity and to plunder and to open shame, as it is this day. 8 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 His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage. 9 For we are slaves; yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, but has extended lovingkindness 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. 10 Now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, 11 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 have filled it from end to end and with their impurity. 12 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.' 13 After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds 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, 14 shall we again break Your commandments and intermarry with the peoples who commit these abominations? Would You not be angry with us to the point of destruction, until there is no remnant nor any who escape? 15 "O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we 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."

1 Now while Ezra was praying and making confession, weeping and prostrating himself before the house of God, a very large assembly, men, women and children, gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept bitterly. 2 Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, said to Ezra, "We have been unfaithful to our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. 3 So now let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the 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 this matter is your responsibility, but we will be with you; be courageous and act."

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we come to You this morning asking that You might grant us grace from on high, that You might by Your Spirit open blind eyes, open dulled eyes of those who already have been awakened, open dull hearts, and may Your word accomplish the purpose for which You send it. We pray this for the glory of Your Son and in His name. Amen.*

The nature and necessity of repentance. This essential fruit is something that we must do. Depending upon grace, knowing that he must help us, we actively pursue the work of repentance in complete dependence upon God. The passage that shows this reality of the synergism of how so many things in the Christian life really are synergism. It really, in a sense, it's almost all that way. Everything we do, we do because God helps us but one would be Philippians 2:11-12 where Paul commands the Philippians, he says, "Work out your salvation in fear and trembling." He says, "Work out your salvation. Get to work." Not let go and let God. "Get to work. Work out your salvation in fear and trembling for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure." You see the synergism: work because he works. Work trusting that he's working. And even as you find the power to do the work, give him praise for what he's doing in you but keep working.

So now what does it mean? What is repentance? What's the nature of this necessary fruit of awakening? We're gonna look at two things this morning that they did, two actions that Ezra led the people to do and that we must do if we are to truly repent. The first action if you want to repent, you want to pursue the work of repentance, you must mourn over your sin. Mourn, actively mourn over your sin. This is something that Ezra models for us in a beautiful way and there are two subpoints under this. How do you mourn over your sin?

Well, first of all, Ezra takes, this is the first subpoint, mourn over your sin, Ezra took an active posture of mourning. An active posture of mourning. Note how the text gives us descriptive terms that show us even the physical things that he did. That's what I'm talking about here, the active posture of mourning. He tore. In verse 3, look how he responds when he hears about the sin, "When I heard about this matter," chapter 9, verse 3, "I tore my garment and my robe." He tears his garment and his robe, a way of expressing actively his repentance. He tears his, it's like if I tore my shirt and my t-shirt. This wouldn't tear but if I could tear it, you know? They don't have buttons or whatever. He's got a tunic over it and a robe over that. He tears both to express his grief.

He pulls out some of his hair and his beard. I'm not saying that you're supposed to do these things literally today. You know, if I see you and you're missing some hair, well, praise the Lord for your repentance. Some of you have already repented quite a bit, it looks like. No, it's not to copy the exact, these were cultural ways of expressing but what I want you to see, though, is there is something about the physical nature of it and our bodies do play a role. There's something about, I mean, we can't, we're body, soul, we're body/soul together. That's the whole person, the union of two parts, body and soul, and I think that our bodies are more important than we sometimes think. C. S. Lewis makes this point in one of his books, I can't remember which one it was, but he talks about

posture in prayer makes a difference; that to kneel at times in prayer is a very good thing because your body helps your soul, in a sense. And so this is what's happening here. He's tearing his clothes. He's pulling out his hair because of the extreme radical grief that he feels because this is an appalling, detestable reality that is happening among the people of God.

And then he sat down appalled. "I sat down appalled," verse 3. He sat down. We mentioned that "appalled" means "to be actually stunned to the point of silence; to be stupefied by something." So he sits down silent. Now that seems not so active but it is. He's actively sitting down and shutting his mouth and saying nothing because he's mourning, and the text tells us he's saying nothing, he's not started preaching a sermon. He hears the report, tears his clothes, pulls out some of his hair and his beard, sits down and says nothing and the people gather to him. It's clear that his grief and his mourning are real and the people move toward him. "Everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel on account," they're also appalled as they hear this and realize how bad it is.

And he said, "I sat appalled until the evening offering." This means hours. The evening offering, you had the morning offering and the evening offering. At sunrise they offered a lamb and at sunset they offered a lamb, and that bracketed the day and all the sacrifices in the temple. He sits until the evening offering, probably around 5 PM this time of year. It was around December 1<sup>st</sup> would have been about the day that this happens, 458 BC.

And so Ezra sits until the evening offering and he says nothing. Silent all that time, and at the time of the evening offering he arises, he said, "I arose from my humiliation." He gets up from his humiliation. That means self-affliction. I think it's speaking of the fact that he has not eaten anything or drunk anything since he heard. He has put himself in a posture of mourning and he sits there until the evening offering and then he stands up from that humiliation and he reminds us, "with my garment and my robe torn." And what does he do next? "I fell on my knees and stretched out my hands," and then he prays.

And look how chapter 10, verse 1, we read through the prayer but you saw in chapter 10, verse 1, we have now the third person here again and we have this description. "Now while Ezra was praying and making confession, weeping and prostrating himself before the house of God." What was Ezra doing? He was praying and making confession. He was weeping. This pictures crying with a wailing kind of at times. It's not a quiet just tear in the eye. He is weeping. Sobbing at times as he's talking to the Lord, and prostrating himself. Other translations, the NIV says "throwing himself down." Actually I like that a little better because prostrating himself doesn't speak as clearly to us today. Prostrate means to lay flat. The ESV says "casting himself down." So he stands up to pray, he's praying and at some point he's weeping and sobbing and he throws himself down apparently as he's praying.

So you see, Ezra in repenting, he takes an active posture of mourning. He works at mourning. Now I want to add a second subpoint here under mourn over your sin. It's not just about posture, there's an active pursuit of mourning. An active, not just an active posture of mourning but an active pursuit of mourning. He sat down appalled, we said

stupefied, stunned, silent. He stays silent for hours. I mean, if this happened at 10 AM, he's sitting there silent for seven hours. Imagine that, seven hours of silence. That actually, that might be something just a good thing as a discipline to try, especially some people. I know I'm one that would benefit from that. I don't stay silent that much. I talk too much. So just trying not to say anything for seven hours of being awake. But this isn't just an exercise, this is out of his grief. He's so appalled at what he's heard that he is unable to speak and in his mourning he's actively staying silent apparently to meditate, to pray silently to God.

You know, meditation, I think that's what he is doing. I think he's sitting there thinking about what he's just heard and he's considering all of the Scriptures that he knows. Remember he's a man and we're told in chapter 7, verse 6, he was a scribe skilled in the Scriptures. The verb "skilled" means he was quick, he was able to move throughout the Bible with ease because he understands how the whole Bible fits together. He's got so much of it memorized and committed to understanding and he is thinking about all that God has commanded, he's thinking about all that God has done in the history of his people and we know that because this is what's gonna come out in his prayer. It's this kind of meditation and silent mourning that leads to a really good confession later. It wasn't a quick confession and sometimes in certain circumstances it's good to be quick and confess. You know, you're convicted over a sin. Yes, confess it. But often what we need to do is take some time to mourn over it. One of the reasons that we commit the same sin over and over and over again is we don't take time to mourn over our sin. You see, we don't actively seek to repent.

He's meditating on the word. He's in silent prayer. He's fasting. He's not eating or drinking. He's denying himself any creature comforts so that he can focus completely on mourning over sin. I mean, he might have been thinking, he might have had this passage I think based on what he says and even what the Jews said to him, or the person reports to him in chapter 9, verses 1 and 2, I think he might have preached on this passage. Deuteronomy 7:1-11, and I wonder if he's even meditating on this as well as other passages. I mean, he's got six or seven hours of silence.

Deuteronomy 7, look at this and see how clearly it speaks to the situation because the returned Israelites, God has brought them back to build, the temple has been rebuilt in the first return, they've come back to beautify the temple, to bring the law of God back to the people of God so that the people of God can be holy, belonging to him, that Jerusalem will again be a center of true worship of Yahweh, and so they've come back to be separate and distinct from all of the ungodly idolatry around them. Remember it's not about racial issues here, it's about spiritual commitments of the people, the nations that he mentions, they're committed to the worship of other gods. And so to intermarry with them is to share in their ungodly idol worship and you see this in the passage. I think that he, Deuteronomy 7.

I want to read verses 1 to 11 and just see how this informs our understanding. He says in Deuteronomy 7:1, "When the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the

Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you." Five of those seven are in the passage we read earlier in Ezra. When he clears those out from before you, clears away these nations before you, verse 2, "and when the LORD your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them. Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you. But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, and smash their sacred pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire. For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth." I mentioned before in previous messages that these nations in Canaan were excessively wicked. You can read about it in Leviticus 18-22, the practices of the nations: child sacrifice, all kinds of sexual perversion and deviancy, all kinds of immorality. And we're told that Abraham was told 400 years before this time when they're going into the land, more than 400 years before, that God was not gonna let him go into the land yet because the wickedness of the Amorites, the wickedness of the Canaanites was not yet complete. God was giving them more time to repent. But then when they had not repented, they continued in their wickedness and basically it's a land full of people like Sodom and Gomorrah.

So when God sends them in, he sends them in to express his wrath. This was kind of a particular thing the Lord is teaching us at that time that doesn't apply today. There is no call for us ever to do anything like that, physical violence like that ever again, but this was something the Lord was teaching us, his hatred of wickedness and evil as he brings judgment. But the point of what they were to see is the reason he tells them not to intermarry with them or give your daughters to their sons, or to take their daughters for your sons, is they will turn your hearts to doing all of the abominations that they do. You will become like them. You will worship false gods. You will turn to all kinds of deviant sexual practice from homosexuality to bestiality. You will become like them in their wickedness and an abomination yourselves. Do not do this. You are to belong to God. You are to be holy. The reality is and today the application is for Christians, we don't intermarry unbelievers. It's a foolish thing to do that because there will be a tendency if you as a Christian marry an unbeliever, there will be a strong pull upon you away from complete devotion to Jesus. Now if you're married to an unbeliever already, then the Lord says you labor at being faithful to God, you don't leave that marriage. We're in a realm of grace and God may bring them to salvation.

We pointed out how the Lord has shown mercy to all of those people groups, even four of those are included in the line of Christ, but what I want you to see is as Ezra is thinking about that, he's not thinking about those, he's thinking about the fact that the Lord was so clear in telling us what to do when they went into the land. He was so clear. He said, "Do not intermarry with the people of the lands when you go in. When Moses leads you in, do not, or Moses leads you to the brink of the Jordan and Joshua leads you in, do not



intermarry with the people. It could not be clearer. And what did the Israelites do? They disobeyed these commands. They became like the world around them, ungodly, and they quit worshiping Yahweh with a whole-hearted devotion and so the Lord then sends them into exile, the Babylonian exile, for 70 years. It's what it's kind of like is a woman is unfaithful to her husband in a horrible way over a prolonged period of time and she's found out, there's separation for a while, then there's a glorious restoration. He forgives her. There's a restoration. They're beginning to rebuild their relationship. It takes a long time. Forgiveness can be instant but trust is something that has to be rebuilt and the intimacy and the closeness has been so deeply damaged, and so that's beginning to be rebuilt and then you hear that she has gone to another lover again after all that. That's the kind of, that's a glimpse of what Ezra is feeling here. "How could we do it! God has welcomed us back into his heart, into his family room, and we are treading on his love again! How appalling!" And so he sits appalled for hours meditating on the Scriptures and thinking back through the history of what God had done.

Let's read on down still in Deuteronomy 7, he says, verse 6 again, we'll start at verse 6, "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth." Look, he chose you. He didn't choose any other peoples, he chose you. "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments; but repays those who hate Him to their faces, to destroy them; He will not delay with him who hates Him, He will repay him to his face. Therefore, you shall keep the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which I am commanding you today, to do them."

One of the things that's really beautiful about the book of Deuteronomy is how you see love and the commandments of God. It's the second giving of the law. It's what Deuteronomy means, deuterio, second, nomos, law. The second giving of the law. It was given first in Exodus 20 and now it's given here in Deuteronomy 5 and through the book of Deuteronomy. And in Deuteronomy what's added is the Lord makes clear that his law is given to his people as an expression of his love for them. God loves you and gives you his law and you say you love God, then if you love God, you will keep his commandments. You will love his law and you will guard his commandments.

So Ezra's thinking about this, meditating about this, "How can we have done this again so quickly after the Lord just brought us back? Just brought us back into the fold and here we are doing this thing?" He's probably thinking about Malachi 2:10-16. We won't look at it today but you can look at it this week where Malachi, a contemporary of Ezra, possibly before, possibly later in Nehemiah. We don't know exactly when Malachi overlaps here but in chapter 2, 10 to 16, he speaks of the people of Israel, the men going after and marrying foreign wives and then divorcing their Jewish spouses, and he is

appalled and he uses a term there four different times, "You have dealt treacherously with your wife of your covenant. You have dealt treacherously." It means a deceptive and covert action that destroys. You have done something quietly under cover of darkness and yet you have destroyed. You have done something evil, a betrayal that has happened.

He might have been thinking of Malachi's preaching. He meditates on the Scripture and you see what is meditation on the Scripture do? It helps you see how ugly sin is. It creates more mourning for sin, doesn't it? It's what sin really is and when you and I sin, we're sinning against an even clearer revelation of love. We have come to see who God is in a whole different level than these people had seen. We've come to see God in the face of Jesus Christ who is the image of the invisible God, the perfect representation of his character, and if you've come to know Jesus, then sin and especially prolonged sin is dealing treacherously and we need to take time to mourn over our sin and how hardened and calloused we get to it. The more you sin, the easier it becomes to sin and the duller you become to conviction.

Another thing to think about here is, it's really interesting, back to Ezra, the text of Ezra, his confession, notice how in verses 5 and the first part of 6 he's speaking in the first person singular: I, me and my. In the middle of verse 6, he changes to the first person plural: we, our and us. Verse 5, "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.'" He identifies with the sins of the people. He takes his place among the sinners. He's not done these things himself but he understands something and this is something to mourn on: private sin has corporate consequences. You see this in Daniel 9 as well, that there's something about private sin that affects the whole camp. Another illustration of it, you can look at Joshua 7, the story of Achan, Achan and his sin and how the whole people are defeated because this one man, Achan, has hidden something away that was under the ban. Your sin affects every other believer. My sin affects every other believer.

Ezra takes, it's beautiful how he does this. I showed you in verse 6 and verse 7, "Since the days of our fathers," verse 7, "to this day we have been in great guilt, and on account of our iniquities." Look down at verse 10, "Now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments." Verse 13, "After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and our great guilt, since You our God have requited us less than our iniquities deserve." Verse 14, "shall we again break Your commandments and intermarry?" Verse 15, "O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we have been left an escaped remnant, as it is this day; behold, we are before You in our guilt." It completely identifies because he understands that there is a sense in which private sin impacts everyone.

And you can see this in a very real way just in the everyday life. I mean, I know that if I'm not walking in the Spirit and I am just not fellowshiping with the Lord, I'm gonna be more sinful and I create a climate around me, a cloud around me, and that affects my

family. But there's something more profound than that going on. The Lord wants us to see that we are a body and if one member hurts, all hurt. So if one member is hurting under some burden of sin, the whole body is affected in some profound way. Then when you realize that, what you think, what you're doing in secret that you think that no one else knows about is affecting everyone else you care about and it's affecting them far more than you can imagine. So mourn over that, "Lord, God, forgive me! I thought," because you listened to the lie of Satan that you can do this quietly and it won't affect others. No, that is a lie just like everything else that comes out of his mouth. It is a lie. He is a liar and the father of lies.

So mourn over your sin. Actively mourn. Spend time meditating on the Scriptures that relate to the area that you're struggling with. You know, like the song that we sang earlier and Ted shared from Matthew 6 and chapter 5, 6 and 10 or whatever, anyway about the sparrow. You think about sparrows don't worry but I'm a worrier, if that's true of you, and in worry what I'm saying is God can't take care of me. I cannot trust God to take care of me. I think he might have forgotten me. I think he may be just a God who doesn't care enough about his people. So if you're a worrier and you're demonstrating that to people around you, your worry is impacting them and testifying against God every day, and if you want to be delivered from that, meditate on that. Fear, lust, greed, anger, all of these things have the same kind of impact. It lies about God.

So mourn over your sin, actively mourn over sin. That's what God's calling us to do. Now we're gonna look at the second point next week, confess your sin, but I want to point out how this mourning over sin, so we're just covering one point today, how this mourning, really the powerful way God used it, the fact that he worked at mourning. He didn't start immediately to go deal with the problem. I mean, you would do if you were thinking, you know, zeal for righteousness, "Hey, we gotta go find out who all these people are. We gotta get this dealt with." The first thing he did was he went to God in mourning and because of that the Lord is shaping his heart in those hours of silence so that his confession is a wonderful and glorious confession. He now because I'm sure at first, do you know what I would be thinking? Wouldn't you think if you were Ezra, "You know, I've come back. I've come from 1,000 miles away. I brought all these people. It was not easy. I risked my life to go ask the king to let us come back. We got this incredible offering I brought." Remember it was like \$180 million in gold and silver. It wasn't like I just came in with a U-Haul. "I mean, we came with some serious blessing for these people and I've come and I'm teaching the law of God to them and this is the thanks I get?" He must have had some of that in his heart initially but the Lord shaping him in his, I mean, he's obviously a man who walks in the truth but even in the time of meditation he's able to work through anything that might be in his heart like that and he identifies with God's interest and he gets on God's agenda, and he mourns from his heart actively because sin should be mourned over.

That's one of the hardest things. I think, you know, if you don't like pain, nobody likes pain, some of us are quicker to run from it than others, you kind of want to get past the pain to the relief. "Okay, you're right. I sinned. Okay, I want to confess it. Please forgive me. Okay, we're good now? You are required to confess, I mean, to forgive me, you

know?" Have you ever said something like that? One of the helpful things in "The Peacemaker" by Ken Sande is he points out in a chapter on confession, the seven A's of confession, biblical confession. He says one of the key things is you acknowledge the hurt. This is talking about between us horizontally, but it certainly applies this way too. But he's applying it horizontally. If you're gonna confess to someone that you've offended, you need to think about and reflect on how this must have hurt them and a really biblical God-honoring confession would say, "Please forgive me for the way I spoke to you. I know that must have been very painful for me to say those things that I said in the tone I said, and they were just ungodly things and it must have hurt. Please forgive me." You see how that's different than just, "Hey, I know what I said was wrong. Please forgive me."

Well, if that's true of people to people, how much more is it true for us and God? To mourn over sin is to mourn over how it has affected our God, our Savior, and so to spend time working at mourning over sin is a way to pursue real repentance and brokenness. Ezra does this and you see in that verse, chapter 10, verse 1, the Spirit of God is just moving around him as he is praying and making confession and weeping and prostrating himself before the house of God, a very large assembly, men and women and children, gathered to him from Israel. People come around him and this spirit of mourning is contagious. You see, when you mourn for your sin in the same way when you sin it affects other people negatively, when you pursue godly mourning for sin, it does the opposite, it affects your brothers and sisters positively. When you are broken and you walk in brokenness, you beget brokenness around you and more and more people are seeing themselves before God as we really are, hopeless and helpless, humble, and then able to receive his grace with so much more power for God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

One thing I want you to think about this week and next week going into this sermon, I want to mention this, I think there's a sense in which Ezra is a wonderful type of Jesus Christ. I've alluded to this a little bit in the past in previous messages. Remember the name Ezra means help, help from God, and often in Scripture you have men who were types of Christ. Obviously David, Moses, there are others, Daniel, Ezra. He's a type of Christ and he's a type of Christ in the way that he does two things in this passage, though in reality he is a man who in himself is righteous. I mean, he's not perfect, he's a sinner saved by grace but relatively speaking he's a man who's holy, right? He's a man who's skilled in the Scriptures. He's a priest devoted to God. He's not intermarried to any foreigner. But what does he do? As the leader he identifies with the sins of the people. It's not just that there's a corporate nature and he realizes that, that's there too but he actively identifies with them. He identifies with them and from in their midst now he intercedes for them. Two things: identifies and intercedes. The Lord Jesus Christ is the ultimate expression of that reality. God the Son left the glory of heaven and he came down and he identified with his people.

Isaiah 53:12, the prophet after that wonderful passage, an amazing passage about the suffering servant, he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, remember? In chapter 53:12 at the end of that passage he says he was numbered among

the transgressors. Jesus willingly came down and was numbered among the transgressors. This is what makes the baptism of Christ so beautiful. You remember the baptism of Jesus? Remember John the Baptist has come to make way for the Lord, to make the way straight for the Lord? His ministry is to come and preach repentance to the people of Israel, the Jews, which was astounding. This is why the Pharisees were so shocked, because John was saying, "You need to repent and you need to be baptized." He was essentially saying the same thing and to be baptized before Jesus comes, now this is Old Testament Jews, the only people who were baptized were Gentile converts. Jews just had to be circumcised. They didn't have to be baptized. But John says, "You need to be baptized because Messiah is coming." He's saying, "You who think you're clean are not clean, you must be baptized. In reality you're as filthy as the Gentiles." That is the message of John the Baptist. That's why the Pharisees did not like his message. "You are filthy. We need to be baptized." That's what he's saying.

Now think about John, he's in the water, he's baptizing, he's preaching and baptizing, he's baptizing so many different people, people are coming to repentance and he sees the one that the Spirit told him is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and the holy one of God, remember what John has said about him? "After me," they said, "Are you the Messiah," to John? "No, I'm not the Messiah. There's One coming after me who is greater than I, who was before me, the thong of whose sandal I am unworthy to untie. He's coming after me. Wait for Him. The Messiah's coming. We're getting ready for Him." That Messiah walks down in the river and says, "John, baptize Me." You understand why John said, "Me baptize You? You need to baptize me." And Jesus says, "It is necessary to fulfill all righteousness." What was he doing? He was identifying with our sin. He was saying, "I have come to identify with their sin and to represent them before God. It's necessary. I'm numbered among the transgressors. Yes, I'm a Lamb without spot or blemish, I'm clean." But our Messiah identifies fully with us and then from the point of having bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, he then intercedes for us before God. He comes and he says, "O God, have mercy on them. Have mercy on these people that are Mine. See them not for who they are but for what I have done."

A few weeks ago we read, I think Ted read from Hebrews 7, I think it's verse 25 speaking about Jesus as a superior high priest. What makes him such a great high priest is he is risen from the dead and he lives to make intercession for his people. He is living. Today he is making intercession for you. He identifies with you so as you seek to mourn over your sin, realize that you're getting closer and you want to pursue oneness with the one who identified with you and is even now interceding for you, praying that God will grant you fuller and deeper repentance, praying that the Father will bless you with more and more holiness, more and more likeness to Christ.

So mourn over your sin but mourning over your sin leads to joy in Christ because as ugly as our sins are, our Savior is able to make us white as snow. That's why Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The second Beatitude, "Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted." When you mourn over your sin, God lifts up your face and he wipes away the tears from your eyes. If you won't mourn over your sin, if you're too proud to mourn over your sin, then you will

suffer and you will be weeping through eternity. But if you'll repent now and mourn over your sin, you will have joy forever.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we praise and honor You, the King of heaven. We, Lord, we acknowledge that we don't see as we ought to see. We minimize our sin. We hide it. We aren't grieved by it as we should and all of our sin is unfaithfulness, it's infidelity, it's like always spiritual adultery. Whenever we sin, with whatever sin we commit, if we belong to Jesus it's adultery. Father, grant us light. Give us zeal to actively repent and to turn from sin. We know that You must do it, Lord. It has to be of grace for there is no good thing in us, but we plead with You, Lord, to pour out Your grace upon us and give us energy and help us to actively take steps ourselves that we know we need to take, and as we take those steps, Lord, fill us with Your power and make us truly broken for the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise, and let us see more of Jesus. May He be the Comforter who comforts us. And we pray in His name. Amen.*