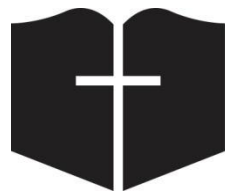


From the Pulpit of



EVANSTON
Bible Fellowship

Don't Waste Your Renewal

No. 8

Ezra 10:6-44

August 14, 2016

Series: Ezra

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Let me show you what I mean as we finish up the book of Ezra. The book of Ezra documents the second Exodus. The first Exodus was when God led his people out of Egypt under Moses. The third Exodus was when Jesus led His people out of sin throughout His perfect life, atoning death and victorious resurrection. But the book of Ezra focuses on the second Exodus in which God led His people from their exile in Babylon back to Jerusalem. This second Exodus started 100 years before the priest Ezra was involved (Ezra 1-6 – 100 years, Ezra 7-10 – Timeline of 1 year). Ezra's mission was to build the people up in the Law of the Lord. Ezra was focused on restoration, to see the people of God spiritually renewed in their commitment to the Lord. It's a story of starting over. The Main Theme: God doesn't scrap His wayward people but restores and renews them so they can worship Him.

The book finishes up with a threat to renewal and restoration. Many of the Israelite men had married pagan wives who did not worship the Lord. This was a violation of God's Word and had been the downfall of great men in the past like King Solomon. The reason why it is such a devastating sin is that it leads astray not only individual families into paganism, but it can be the downfall of an entire nation. Ezra has spent so much time and effort making sure that God's people are not only restored to the land, but also to God's Word. But now the people are on the verge of wasting renewal. It's almost as if Ezra ends his book by saying, "Don't waste your renewal!"

Too many times you and I can waste God's renewal in our lives. Maybe you had been in a spiral of sin and God brought you out of it and you started growing, but then you dove back in. You are wasting God's renewal. The Good News this morning is that even if you have wasted God's renewal in your life, there is hope to repent and be renewed again. Let's see it in the book of Ezra.

Ezra 10:6-8: "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. And a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem, 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." The back story is the 'faithlessness of the exiles' taking to themselves pagan wives. They are wasting their renewal and threatening the very existence of the remnant of God's people. Ezra is in deep 'mourning' over the situation not only publicly, but also privately as he won't even eat or drink. At least the seriousness of the transgression is not lost on the leadership as they call all of Israel to 'assemble at Jerusalem'

within 'three days.' Those who refused to come would 'forfeit' their property and be excommunicated from the remnant of the 'exiles.' This is like a pastoral phone call, text or contact. The seriousness of the situation has risen to the point where those in leadership need to get involved and find a resolution. This is not a 'lax' community in that you can do whatever you want and slack off on the commitment to holiness. They take sin seriously and we should as well.

Verse 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." They are 'trembling' not just because of the cold rain but also because of their sin before God. Their sin has shaken them to the bone. Verse 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." The 'guilt of Israel' has 'increased' before the Lord because they were forgiven and restored, but now they have wasted their restoration. The Bible says they are like a 'dog returning to its vomit' (2 Peter 2:22). They have 'broken faith' with the Lord and married 'foreign women' who can lead the Israelites astray into worshipping pagan gods. This is not an 'ethnic' issue but a 'religious' issue. The intermarriage violated the Word of God and threatened to lead the people astray (Exodus 34:11-16). It appears that these women did not convert to Judaism, but remained pagans or syncretistic (tacking on the God of Israel to their own gods). Something must be done.

Throughout Ezra we have seen the returned community face external threats from the surrounding people. But the greater threat is the internal opposition from their own sin that could wipe them out. Your inner struggles will always be a greater threat than any external opposition you may face. I've always said that the biggest problem I have in ministry and in life is not my church, my family or my city; I am my biggest threat. My actions and decisions can have a devastating effect on my life. Only you can waste your renewal! No one but you!

Verse 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." Ezra is describing what needed to be done in this distinct situation of separation from their pagan wives for the preservation of the Israelites. The Word of God does not prescribe this for believers today as you are instructed to stay in your marriage even if your spouse is an unbeliever. Paul describes a situation in 1 Corinthians 7:12-14 in which a believer is converted after marriage and encouraged to stay in the marriage with the unbelieving spouse. Perhaps they will get saved. But in Ezra the problem of intermarriage threatened the very existence of God's people and required deliberate and difficult actions. Not only were the people to call out their sin in 'confession to the Lord' but they were to make a clean break and separate 'from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.' Name your sin for what it is and own it in confession. Repentance is more than just saying 'sorry.' It is turning and going the other way, putting your sin behind you and walking in holiness. 'Separate Yourself!' 'Clean Break!' 'No Dabbling!'

I once heard a medical doctor describing a specific meal plan to get back to a healthy lifestyle. He said, 'You have to follow this with no cheating or you will feel terrible.' Apparently there is something called, "Ketosis" where you burning fat instead of sugar. But if you don't follow the diet exactly you are hovering right above Ketosis, not burning fat or sugar to get energy which will make you feel like garbage. If you are wanting to be restored but are still dabbling in your sin, you will feel terrible because you can't serve two gods. You will feel guilty and convicted until you serve God alone.

Overall the people respond positively with minimal pushback as we see in verses 12-15: "Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, 'It is so; we must do as you have said. 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. 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.' Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite supported them." There were a few who 'opposed' the way forward, but most of them were ready to repent and turn away 'the fierce wrath of God.' They have to have a process of repentance beyond 'one or two days' partly due to the 'heavy rain' but also because they have 'greatly transgressed in this matter' and there are 'many people' involved.

They come up with a plan of repentance and a way forward for corporate repentance. Verses 16-17: "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; and by the first day of the first month they had come to the end of all the men who had married foreign women." Ezra designates men who were local leaders who knew the people and could determine who had transgressed the law.¹ Perhaps they interviewed the wives to see what they believed and whether or not they were followers of the one true God.² After sorting through all the details for about three months they had determined 'who had married foreign women.'

What follows is a list of offenders. And one of the discouraging aspects of this list is that it includes some of the religious leaders such as priests, Levites, singers and gatekeepers. All of them were susceptible to the same sin and fell in deep. Look at these leaders in verses 18-24: "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. They pledged themselves to put away their wives, and their guilt offering was a ram of the flock for their guilt. Of the sons of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah. Of the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah. Of the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasa. Of the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (that is, Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer. Of the singers: Eliashib. Of the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri."

All of Israel was involved as well as we see from verses 25-44: "And of Israel: of the sons of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malchijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Hashabiah, and Benaiah. Of the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah. Of the sons of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza. Of the sons of Bebai were Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai. Of the sons of Bani were Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth. Of the sons of Pahath-moab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh. Of the sons of Harim: Eliezer, Isshijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah. Of the sons of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei. Of the sons of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluhi, Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Mattenai, Jaasu. Of the sons of Binnui: Shimei, Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph. Of the sons of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah. All these had married foreign women, and some of the women had even borne children." And the book ends abruptly because the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are often held together to tell the story of renewal in the land. These wives and kids probably went back to their old families. The action may seem extreme but a renewal and restoration in following the Lord calls for a serious focus. The people must not waste their renewal. Or as Derek Kidner says, "Don't sin away your day of Grace."

¹ Dale Ralph Davis, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, page 3.

² ESV Study Bible, page 820.

Conclusion: Don't waste your Renewal! Don't waste your restoration by becoming entangled again in sin and idolatry. Don't be the dog who returns to his vomit. "Don't sin away your day of Grace." The Good News this morning is that even if you have wasted God's restoration and renewal in your life, there is a chance to repent again and start anew. It's not through the sacrifice of a physical 'ram' but through the sacrifice of the Lamb, the Lamb of God. Jesus died for those who have taken his love and squandered and discarded it. There is grace and mercy to start anew in Jesus for those who take deliberate action and repent. Today is the day for your renewal in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Evanston Bible Fellowship, Evanston, Illinois, by Pastor Jason Lancaster on Sunday, August 14, 2016. It is not meant to be a polished essay or substitute for personal Bible study. Evanston Bible Fellowship is a community of sojourners empowering one another to cultivate Gospel transformation.