

Study in Ezra 10

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[0 : 0 0] I am finishing our third studies in the book of Esra tonight. This will be a very short address. It was really by way of the gathering together a few of the thoughts that we had last week in connection with chapter 9 and a few from verse 10 in connection with the reforms that Esra carried out in Jerusalem.

We saw last week that when Esra returned to Jerusalem, about 60 years or so after the completion of the temple, he discovered that things had changed dramatically, father was spiritually in Jerusalem.

The enthusiasm and the spiritual revival, which had characterized the days of the completion of the temple, these were to a large extent gone.

And you will note that, for example, if a son maintained the book of Malachi, falls into that particular period, during that 60-year period, you will discover from the book, from the prophecy of Malachi, how desperately poor things have become spiritually.

and that book throws into overly the exercise of a very few spiritually exercised people in Jerusalem who, at that time, met together and talked up with the things of the Lord and speak of them one to another.

[1 : 4 4] And that book of remembrance was written. It was a bad period that these two people gathered together in Jerusalem to talk many equally about the things of the Lord.

Generally, a spiritual malaise hung over the whole area. And this was weak saw last week because of the carelessness that had crept into very spiritual lines.

And with that carelessness, a spirit of sloth and slothfulness and indolence had taken over.

And this was seen particularly in that contrary to God's express commandment, these Jews had married many of them, the semi, some of the semi-pagan, from the semi-pagan races that surrounded Jerusalem and the Samaritans.

And it was because of that that the chastisement of God had come upon them as a people.

[3 : 1 0] They had forgotten the great injunction delivered that they were to keep themselves as a people separate unto the Lord.

And we noticed that this in applying it to ourselves today that this is very often what happens that a person, a Christian, can very soon lose his enthusiasm and his zeal and his consecration, his spirit of dedication which may have characterized in the first flesh of Christian belief and contentment with the Lord.

It is very easy for us to lose that enthusiasm, that dedication, that spirit of separation from the world. It is very easy for us to lose that and to have our witness and our interests and our testimony compromised by the insidious influence of the world and of our enemy, the devil.

And we have to be of God against all the time. You remember how I quote you last week the belief of many in the evangelical church today that it is that spirit that the evangelical church must get rid of and get back to its own puritanism to show that whatever else is true in the church this must always be true of it.

That it is definitely distinct from and separate from the world and the spirit of the world and must show that its interests lie elsewhere.

[5 : 09] That its environment with the world is as Jesus was in the world to save the world from itself.

And those of you who are involved and trying to bring the influence of the grace of God to bear upon the world in which you live will have discovered I am sure that there are times when rather than win the world from its influence it didn't can always exist that the world will influence you.

I also remember a story that a young student used to tell about his own days as student when he found himself lodging in a boarding house in one of universities with a considerable number of young fellows who were not interested in the church at all and he thought that he would try to win them to the influence of the gospel and he noticed that after supper that many of them sat on to play some card games and the thought struck him that having been interested in playing cards at one time himself the thought struck him that perhaps he might win their confidence by joining them in this exercise but note it was for the purpose of winning them for the gospel and for the church and he said that it didn't take him very long to discover that instead of winning them through that it was a pretty innocuous pursuit of that instead of winning them through them he soon discovered that pursuit was winning him to their way of thinking and instead of his exercising and he was in danger of being won over by them now every

Christian is open to that temptation and we have to be extremely careful that living as we are in a world which is far far too strong and too deceitful for any one of us we have to be careful that we don't get sucked into it even at the very time as we are trying to win people away from the gentleness to to and to the church remaining and retaining its separateness from the world as a matter of part the more distinct the difference between the church and the world the better for the church now when Esther discovered that the state of the age was such we saw in chapter 9 that he prayed now you will notice that if you read through that prayer again that it is characterized by deep personal sorrow by a deep sense of shame because he saw the necessity for the church to separate itself from the people whom it had got involved culturally to the command of

God and there are times when and indeed every penitential prayer every prayer which has a spirit of penitence in it is characterized by this deep sense of sorrow and shame and show that those of you who would wish that there was more of this element in your own prayers that there weren't quite as formed and that there were more of the spirit and more of the spirit and the sense of shame and of unmerging it is also characterized by a considerable element of an awareness of the grace of God towards them as a people God Ezra acknowledges has restored them to this promised land and they had seen the grace of God many years before that the goodness of God and his grace and bringing them back and here he is now alone confessing our elapse into sin and this is something else we have to regard it we do know what it is to be aware of the goodness of the goodness of

[10 : 33] God to us in his grace but unfortunately we also know what it is to relapse into the old race it isn't about reason that the Bible warns us in a very very telling way to beware that we don't return to our sin you want to picture the pit even as a dog returns to its own vomit we have got that attitude to the sins from which God has by his grace delivered us and this is our hope that the grace of God can deliver us from sin but we have responsibility to make sure that we don't give sin the chances whether it looks for every day in our lives then the plural is also characterized by this verse 14 that oppression can keep as it were falling back into the old ways in such a way that his heart becomes hardened you know continual practice continual wrong practice will harden your heart when you are converted and you believe that

God has forgiven your sins you fear that you may sin but unfortunately the longer we go on and this is where you see the deceit from the heart the longer you go on the easier it is for you to fall into the things that you were afraid of perhaps a few days or a year or two before that and you look back you will find that when you become the more acquainted you become with these things things that you don't want to do at all you will soon discover that the thing that used to appear doesn't appear anymore when I was a cat crossing a white road and a cat doesn't let you see to test as it were see what things are like and it draws immediately lifts its paws shapes but then you see it does it two or three times and then before you are the cat is crossing around it got used to the condition that's the way it is with the heart and sin and it wasn't just

Pharaoh remember that Pharaoh for example hardened his heart why how was that was it by continuing to do the things that we ought not to have done same as we have to be sure to be aware of this that we do not harden our hearts and then the prayer also acknowledges this a connection between sin and justice meant this is what Ezra says we know Lord I know that the captivity came into our experience into our existence into our history because of sins that's why we are taken into captivity and now he says here we are again back from the captivity and we don't seem to have learned our lesson we don't seem to have learned our lesson so he sees here the connection that exists between sin and justice we know we can't deny this we cannot deny this and

I'm sure that it is it gives considerable exercise to the Christian heart to try at times and see the connection between present circumstances and sin neglect indifference carelessness and so on your complaint for example of a hard heart cold spirit lack of sin in the things of God is there a connection between these things perhaps in private life that probably is that probably is I know that there are chastisements such as the ones the Puritan who have to refer to us when the clouds are in the heavens and you wonder why they're there and you do know why they're there

I know that there may be things like that but I think that these are the exceptions rather than rules in our own life there is a connection between sin and chastisement I deferred I spoke about this a few Sunday evenings I'm going to do have to happen with him again and and and and and and and and and and and of course our captivity was because of those sins but this is what Ezra said the chastisement is far less than we deserve it and who doesn't have to say that if there were to mark in equity Lord who would stand none of us has ever received as much on the way of chastisement from the kind of God as we deserve in the same way as every one of us has received far more good from his heart than we ever deserve we are to be mastered in our hearts by our consideration and the mercies of God to us and we are to see in that very light the awfulness and the enormity of our sins when in the face of all the privileges and the face of all the blessings that we have and it is this tendency in our heart to forget and to deny our

[16 : 57] Lord so Ezra lifts up his heart and pray to God confesses that sin in the name of the people and acknowledges that ill deserved and chapter 10 tells us how this prayerful penitential attitude of Ezra and those who are around him sinned in the hand of God to work wonders amongst this people a huge crowd gathered around the vicinity of the temple as we read in verse 13 in this pouring way they gathered them brought together in a very wonderful way in a very extraordinary way by the by the working of God convincing them through this one man convincing them of the sin so that they accepted the rightness of

God's chastisement of them and the person who sees that God is right in chastising him as well in the way to recovery under the hand of God and it's wonderful what God can do through one person through the penitence of one person through the prayer life of one person you know that it is recorded that some of the great believers which have hid this land can be attributed to one or two prayer people in their community and look at what we do in our own life and in my own life we gave more time to this and we sought the spirit of God in prayer and in penitence because remember this as I see in a minute of this I close remember all this is going to cost each one of us it's going to cost we need to we need the speed of prayer we need the discipline of prayer we need to put feeling into our prayer life we need to trot out we need it we need it to be deep but in the words that we tend to trot out in private prayers before our

Lord we need to give more time to it and which one of us cannot do that if we only apply ourselves to these people if we only assess the situation in preference to ourselves and to us well God what through this month assembled a huge gathering in the precincts of the temple these people with Ezra lifted up their voices to God and when they when the world when this was when they accepted the situation as it was brought before them by God the only thing they could do was cast themselves upon the mercy of God did I say the only thing no not wrong there was something else that they could do but they cast themselves upon the mercy of

God and as the sin was brought before them they separated themselves in the matter which had brought the justice in the area in which they had gone wrong in this intermarriage between themselves and the semi-pagan races and the Samaritans from the areas surrounding Jerusalem and recognized that what they had done was contrary to the mind and to the will of God they went through with it separated inside the men and the one of course as I said last week some may say but at what tremendous cost what agony what suffering what pain that separation cost them exactly could it and this was a tragedy of the situation who is to blame for that

God no but himself who is to blame for the situation which you and I find ourselves because of the wrong course of action that we take somebody else oh no we are we are who is to blame for the wrong turning that we take for the wrong association that we form for the wrong practice that we engage in confident to the will of God just because we want to do these things who is to blame we are then when it comes to penitence and this is very often the case more people than ourselves are involved in the agar and in the pain and in the cost cutting ourselves off from these that's why the Bible pictures repentance as being a thorough reformation that is why

[22 : 44] Jesus uses the word repentance and speaks of us as the as the most thorough revolution that could take place in a person's life remember how he puts it remember the great chapter in which he uses this word therefore I say unto you that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that he penitence it is such a thorough work of the joy in heaven above and this is the way that God wants you and I to deal with all these hard practices and pursuits and interests and associations that we may have formed our own lives privately or publicly we have to go through with this separation whatever it is that you and I have slipped away and the standard set before us by the word of God we've got to get back oh yes it's really going to cost but don't blame anybody for it but you say

I can't face it you have to in the interest of your own soul for the sake of the glory of God you have to do I need to spell out for you where these areas may be in your own life this is the message of Esther this is the work of reformation and the book of Esther closes and leaves us with that very message it asks you and I as someone has put it to loop back it asks us to loop back and it asks us to have a look at our own lives and it asks us to see if things are as true and dedicated with us today as they were and if they are not what is it that has dulled old affection and having asked this

God through this man wants us to put these things to us and not before that the book of Esther leaves us and the next time we see this man we see them engaged in the same exit calling the people of a 13 year up calling the people in the time of Nehemiah calling them again through the word of God back to our dedicated commitment of life and health to the God of Israel and that is what the word of

God does for you and for me tonight speaks to you at the city of Nain it calls you back calls me to the same kind of commitment we can see more of them as we resume these studies again in the book of Nehemiah let us pray bless us Lord with thy presence we confess our sins all to thou hast them help us to confess them our and help us to love the Lord with all our minds with all our hearts and with all our strength to grace we can to point these areas in our lives where we have gone wrong and where we have gone astray we thank that the has not cast us off we bless thee that we are the land of the living for thou art which sent me myself to as in thy fruit as the

God and the hope and the savior of this world and the take for us and for all who may come to thee for Jesus sake amen