

Revival in the Book of Ezra - Part 4

by Roy Hession

The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual revival through repentance and separation from sin, as exemplified by Ezra's leadership in restoring the people of Israel.

Duration: 55:56

Scripture: Ezra 9:10, Ezra 9:15, Zechariah 13:7

Topics: "Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the journey of Ezra and a group of 4,000 people who returned to Jerusalem with him. They faced the vulnerability of carrying a large amount of wealth and the threat of bandits along the way. Despite their initial response to put things right, it was not enough to appease God's anger, as they had taken pagan wives. The speaker emphasizes the importance of not only making adjustments but also truly repenting and turning away from sinful behaviors. The purpose of Ezra writing the book is believed to be to address the disturbing news he received upon arriving in Jerusalem.

Transcript

Yesterday we covered quite a bit and we ended up in the end of chapter six. Not only was the house of the Lord marvellously and unexpectedly rebuilt and the mountain of opposition that seemed to make it impossible was sunk to a plane not by might of man nor by power but by God's Spirit. What we didn't go into it's almost inferred there was a great time of celebration when the whole house was completed and they kept for the first time for 70 years the feast of the Passover followed by the feast of unleavened bread and they really felt revival's begun.

That which is at the heart of our nation, the temple, has been rebuilt and really it does picture a state where we've really come into freedom and blessing again into a liberty that we haven't known for years. He has revived in a precious way his work in our souls and maybe you can say in some degree it's happened in our church too, thank God if it has. It's beginning anyway, praise the Lord.

But we move on, it doesn't end there. Chapter seven, now after these things in the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, another king has taken the throne, Ezra the son of Saraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiyah, the son of Shalom, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Merioth, the son of Zechariah, the son of Uzzah, you see what he's doing, he's tracing his ancestry. They were very keen about that, especially as in the case of Ezra, you were one of the tribe of priests and therefore could trace your ancestry back to Aaron, the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas,

the son of Eliezer, the son of Aaron, the chief priests.

Now after those things in that reign, there appears on the page of the story Ezra himself. He's been telling the story, but not until chapter seven does he actually come upon the scene. Verse six, this Ezra went up from Babylon, he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel had given, and the king granted him all his request according to the good hand of the Lord as God upon him.

And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the leavers, and the singers, the porters, and the Nethanims unto Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, the king. And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was the seventh year of the king. For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month came he Jerusalem according to the good hand of his God.

And that journey from Babylon to Jerusalem took him no less than four months. They had to do it on their own two feet. Now this is an altogether new phase in the recovery and the revival of the nation of Israel.

The coming of Ezra up to Jerusalem. There are a number of phases as you can see in this wonderful revival. The first was of course the coming of Zerubbabel according to the edict of Cyrus.

Then sixty years later, the coming of Ezra up from Babylon to Jerusalem. And then twelve years after that, the coming of Nehemiah. And each of these men were returned from Babylon to Israel with a different task to accomplish.

Zerubbabel, why his was the great task of the rebuilding of the ruined temple. And we know how wonderfully that was ultimately accomplished. Sixty years later Ezra came, and his work was not the rebuilding of the temple, not even firstly the beautifying of the temple.

For Artaxerxes simply loaded him up with more and more gifts and further vessels which had been discovered in Babylon. And he was thrilled that God had put into the heart of Artaxerxes to beautify the house of God. It's an extraordinary story.

Why should Cyrus and now Artaxerxes? God was at work. The time to favour Zion, even the set time had come, and God touched King's heart to fulfil his purpose. Not only Cyrus, but Artaxerxes.

But Ezra's task was different. His was to be concerned with the moral state of the people. And he found there was a grievous lack there.

And that's what we should consider. And then came Nehemiah, twelve years after Ezra, and he wasn't concerned with the temple, that was already reconstructed, but he was concerned with the walls. The walls of the city had been broken down and its gates burned with fire.

There was a city in ruins still. And in Nehemiah we see the preoccupation with the walls, the walls. But here comes this second stage, Ezra, a ready scribe, sixty years, if you please, after Zerubbabel.

But where in Babylon God's been dealing with this man, working in his heart, giving understanding in the law of God, a ready scribe and ready interpreter of that law. And he was concerned how the restored people were getting along with regard to the law. This was his burden.

And he introduces himself by giving his own genealogy. He was of the house of the priests. And in verse three it says, this Ezra, it's himself but he puts it, this Ezra went up from Babylon.

And as I read the story again today about what we're going to look at, I've said, this Ezra. What a man. What a deep man.

How much in touch with God. What a spiritual leader. A revival leader indeed.

And every revival movement needs some people that can be called this Ezra. And I'm sure that as we go through our study this morning you'll say, this Ezra. Thank God for it.

I've often wondered who it was that actually put together the two books of Kings and the two books of the Chronicles. Whoever did it knew a thing or two, deeply, spiritually. It's just not copied out of the royal archives.

An interpretation of the moral issues in each man's reign is given. And these men hadn't been long dead when it was penned. No mere copyist of the royal archives would have dared to add in such comments about kings as the writer did.

Do you know who I think it was? It's just my thought of hunch. I believe it was Ezra. Ezra.

When you read how he handled things, he was a man capable of seeing through even kings and interpreting history in the light of God. I don't know for sure, perhaps some of you have studied that and have got some ideas. All right then, we come to this phase.

Now this first chapter, I've only read the opening verses, tells how Artaxerxes has great confidence in this Ezra and commissions him to go to Jerusalem. And the letter that he sent in the hands of Ezra is given us. Once again, there's this very careful reference to the correspondence, quite an important thing to keep the correspondence.

Don't scrap it all when it's occupied. You don't know. Someone may want to write your story up or your part in the story and those letters are going to be valuable.

And this letter that Artaxerxes gave to Ezra, giving him authority to return, telling him what he was to do, is given us in chapter 7. And apparently he was loaded with money, gold and silver from the king and his princes themselves and also from other remaining Israelites. And also precious vessels, they discovered they were still some vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem, they too were restored. And not only did Ezra come back, but he led a further party back.

And I counted it up, he enumerates the people in chapter 8 who came and he enumerates the males. And I just found in chapter 8 that there were 1,446. He just tells us.

And that's only the men. So you imagine with women and children, a party of 4,000. And then he discovered there weren't any Levites or temple workers.

So he sends some again, we must hunt some of them up too. And so this great company of some 4,000, not a great company but it's quite a sizable little extra, came back with Ezra. That's chapter 8. And then there's a lovely bit that I'll just read it to you because it could be a sermon any day of the week you like.

In chapter 8 verse 21, then having got all this party together and all this wealth, they had to take this long four-month journey. And they were very vulnerable with all that wealth. With regard to bandits on the way, I love these next verses.

I think you'll say when you read these verses, oh this Ezra, this Ezra, he was a man. Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of a harbour, that was before they started, they'd just assembled there, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seeketh him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen, to help us against the enemy in the way.

Because we had spoken unto the king saying, the hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him, but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. So being unwilling to seek a military escort which would have been gladly given him, he said, no, we've boasted of our God, and we're going to get it straight with him. And so they had that fast and that great long prayer meeting.

And of course God was delighted. And though that journey was a dangerous one, they made it. And they got to Jerusalem with nothing lost, and they were able to hand over all these precious things, and this gold and silver to the authorities in the temple.

And so it seemed that that commission was successfully finished. But when he got to Jerusalem in chapter nine, it was only to hear very disturbing news. Now I believe this is the main purpose, what we come to now, for which Esther wrote the book at all.

I believe the first six chapters, which are so wonderful, he only tells the story because you wouldn't understand what he's now going to tell you, had you not known about the return of the exiles, and the way in which that temple had been rebuilt. Now the real thing. This is why Ezra's come.

And this is why he's writing the book. All right, let's read it. And once again, this is a bible reading, and because this part of scripture isn't so well known, it's good for us to read it.

And I trust enjoy the mere reading of the word. Now when these things were done, when he'd come back with all this wealth, the princes came to me saying, the people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Merbites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken of their daughters, the daughters of these people, to be wise for themselves, and for their sons, so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands.

Yea, the hand of the princes and the rulers have been chief in this trespass. When I heard this thing, I rent my garments, and my mantle, and I plucked off the hair of my head, he literally did it, and his beard, and he sat down astonished. The revised standard version puts it, I sat down appalled.

That's what it means. Absolutely appalled at this news that has greeted him when he comes back to this supposed revived nation, with its temple rebuilt. Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away, and I sat down appalled, until the evening sacrifice.

And at the evening sacrifice, I rose up from my heaviness, and having rent my garment, and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God, and I said, O my God, I'm ashamed and blushed to lift up my face to thee my God, for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day, and for our iniquities have we, our kings and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the

kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day. And now, for a little space, grace has been shewed from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage.

Only, it was revival, but only a little revival, only a measure of it, but wonderful that there should be any revival at all. When we've been so desperately long, what? Grace. For we were bondmen, yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but has extended mercy unto us, in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah, and in Jerusalem.

And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we've forsaken thy commandments, which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying. And Moses and others, they made it very clear, and here's the quotation, of what their prophets had always said to them, the land into which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land, with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, have they filled it from one end to another, with their uncleanness. Now therefore, this was what the Lord had always said, give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth forever, that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever.

And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that our God has punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and has given us such deliverance as this, should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations, wouldst not thou be angry with us, till thou hast consumed us, so there should not be any remnant nor escaping. O Lord God of Israel, thou art righteous, we don't quarrel with what you've done with us, we remain yet escaped as it is this day, but we're before thee now, in our trespass, in our new trespass, for we cannot stand before thee, because of this. Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he'd confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel, a very great congregation of men and women, for the people, where there is so hollow, dear old Ezra's examples having an effect upon them, it isn't only Ezra who's weeping, they're beginning to weep too.

Praise the Lord, the revival can yet be saved. And Shekinah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, we have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives of the people of the land, yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing, now therefore let us make it a covenant with our God, to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my Lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to the law. Arise, for the matter belongeth unto thee, we also will be with thee, be of good courage and do it.

Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites and all Israel to swear that they should do according to this word, and they swear. Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan, the son of Eliashib, and when he came there, he's apparently not, he's not happy yet, he's still burdened, oh they've made a promise, but nonetheless he did eat no bread, nor drink water, because he mourned because of transgression, still mourning of them that had carried, been carried away. And then they made proclamations through Judah and Jerusalem, and to all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem, that whatsoever, whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that have been carried away.

Then all the men of Judah and Jerusalem and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days, yes they came. It was the ninth month, in the twentieth day of the month, and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain. Although it was pouring with rain, they all came, and sat there in the rain, trembling because of the matter, and also because they were cold, because of the rain.

And as the priests stood up and said unto them, ye have transgressed, and have taken pagan wives, to the increase of the trespasses of Israel. Now therefore, make confession unto the Lord, God of your fathers, and do his pleasure, and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the pagan women. Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, as thou hast said, so be it done.

But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is this the work of one day or two. Oh yes, putting things right isn't the work of a day always. For we are many, and we have transgressed in this thing.

Let now our rulers, and all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities, come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us. Now that's it. What do you think of that? What a story.

Were you familiar with it? And so that's what greeted dear Ezra. He was greeted with the news that the people have not separated themselves from the peoples of this land, doing according to their abominations. This was the one thing that had been forbidden them, always had been, that they were not to take pagan women for their wives.

And the reason was that the pagan women would bring with them the things of their pagan culture, and it wouldn't be very long before their influence would turn God's people away from Jehovah to idols. It happened before, and it was because it had happened before, and the people because of this had gone away back, that God had to bring this tremendous chastening upon them. And here they are, restored, the temple rebuilt, but there's this terrible wrong being perpetrated.

And what's needed here is the revival to be revived. And that's how it often is. The revival needs to be revived.

And maybe the revival that you've experienced in your soul probably needs to be revived. It's always so. Norman Grubb has a book entitled Continuous Revival, in which he talks about the continuous revival in East Africa.

And it needs to be continually revived, and so with us too. You get this in Psalm 85, Psalm 85, verse 6, Will thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee? Do you know there's a, there's a double again in that verse? Will thou not revive? That is, there's been revival, but there's been decadence, decline, and therefore we need revival. And that's the meaning of revival, God doing something again.

But here the psalmist says, will you not please do that again thing, again. And that's it. He says before, will thou be angry with us forever? And I think you can go on to read, won't thou not rather revive us again? Of course he'd much rather do it.

But you've got to see your need of that revival in your soul, and in my soul, and in your church, being revived again. Oh I agree with you, you say, I do need a renewal. You know, I get so little fellowship at

home, I don't get this sort of teaching.

That's not the reason why your revival needs to be revived. If your revival needs to be revived, it's because of sin. And this revival, that was now in such jeopardy, needed itself to be revived because of the sin of the people.

And the sin was, they had not separated themselves from the people of the land, and they'd already begun to do according to their abominations. And that is really what applies to us. It could be, friends, in spite of all that God's done for us, we've not separated ourselves from the people of the world, and we are doing according to their abominations.

Israel were meant to be a separated people, utterly distinct. They were to be God's blessing to the world, but to be a blessing to the world as they were intended to be ultimately, they had to be distinct from the world. And one of the reasons why God brought them into Canaan at all, was because to judge the terrible corruption of those heathen nations.

Everything depended on their separation. Only as they maintained it would they be strong, and would they be able to leave that land as an inheritance to their children. Please turn the cassette over now.

Do not fast wind it in either direction. And they'd been told they were not to take pagan women for their sons or for themselves. And it's because this had happened that the destruction had come, and here they are, doing it again, playing with the very thing that had caused the destruction of their city, and that in spite of the fact that grace had been shown them, and the city was in process of reconstruction.

And you and I are meant to be a separated people, and it's because you weren't. And you went the world's way and compromised that God had to chasten you, and your spiritual life has declined. But praise God a little grace has been shown you, and you've had something of a revival in your soul.

But could it be we've slipped back again, lured our standards, and have not separated ourselves from the world, have not maintained those marks of distinctiveness, and have been actually adopting their standards and doing according to their abominations. Will you turn to 1 John chapter 2 verse 15. 1 John chapter 2 verse 15.

Here it is in the scripture, staring at us. Love not the world. 1 John 2 verse 15.

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, three things, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, it is of the world.

The world are not things, they're people. It is that great mass and majority of people who are content to live their lives, and organize their social life, quite regardless of the will of God. And that is the world as you know it.

You know in many a place, a company, if you start talking about Jesus, and they're passing the glasses round, a chill will come over the whole proceeding. The world and Jesus are in two mutually antagonistic camps. Not that there's any antagonism from God to the world, but there's a mighty antagonism from the world to God.

And we are told that whosoever will be the friend of the world, will be identified with that world, and part of it is the enemy of God. And God has saved us out of the world, he's delivered us, as it says, from this present evil world, to be a peculiar people, a special people for himself, to bear witness from that different position to the world with regard to the Jesus, whom they don't want. Someone has said, the church has a lover's quarrel with the world, because of the place they've not accorded to Jesus.

Now God loves the world, gave his son for us, and we're to love people. Yes, there's a sense in which we're to love the world, but we're also intended to have a deep lover's quarrel with the world. We care to prove a society and a way of living that puts Jesus Christ on the sideline, there's no place for him.

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. And it enumerates the three things in the world there, the lust of the flesh, that means the desire to indulge, that's just common. The desire to indulge, whatever it is, what you want.

It doesn't mean it always be with regard to sex, though often it is. All sorts of things, the desire to indulge. Then, the lust of the eyes, you know, you eye things, that is, we want to possess them, we covet them.

The first is the desire to indulge, the second the desire to possess. If everybody else has it, we want it too. And we can be just as covetous as the world is, but bless God, you're not to be.

That's not of the Father, it's of the world. And the third is the pride of life, the desire to excel, to keep up with the Joneses, if possible to be one ahead of the Joneses. And this is what makes the world tick, the desire to indulge, the desire to possess, the desire to expel, excel.

And here we read, all that is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the things they do are called abomination so often. Jesus said, that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God, to be big, to be out front, to ride rush on over rivals.

Men praise thee when thou doest well to thyself. That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. Doing well to yourself is the thing that people esteem you for, but God doesn't.

And in some degree it may be true of us, that we have not separated ourselves from the world in this deep sense. You don't have to go to a monastery, you've just got to be different. And there are all sorts of things, they aren't terribly important themselves, but I like, I praise the Lord, when it comes say to drinks, I'm delighted if you'll say no thanks.

I like a chance. Oh but is that just an old phobia? Oh no, I have an evangelist friend of mine, he was gloriously saved out of the wildlife. And while I was in America, he's an Irishman working over there, he had a long distance call to me in a thick, thick voice, poked me, Roy can you come and help me, hundreds of miles away.

He was in the middle of a campaign, and the fact that he'd become an alcoholic again revealed itself, and his whole career would be ruined. And it all began with being offered sherry in the home of Christians, where he was about to take meetings. And the oil had awakened the old thing again.

Thank God, grace has reached that man in a wonderful way, and God's made him beautifully dry. I'm more convinced than ever. I don't call it terribly important as the final, most crucial thing.

But anyway, for one thing, it gives me a chance to be different. I want to be different. I don't want to have unthinking taboos.

But that's not an unthinking taboo. That's love for my brother. They say, oh, you know, alcoholism, it's according to the chemistry of a person.

Well, I don't know what the other man's chemistry is, I don't know what my chemistry is. If I permitted myself some latitude, I don't know whether I'll be one of the fellows who's got the wrong chemistry, and I could be caught. But this is an incidental thing.

Oh, there are deeper things. The desire to indulge, the desire to possess like everybody else, and the desire to excel. And in all sorts of ways, I may have been playing with things I quit.

It could be with regard to sex. I do think it is true. Be not unequally together with unbelievers in a marriage relationship.

Oh, that's clear in scripture. But there are all sorts of other ways in which I may not have separated myself. And I've been going easy on sin.

And you won't. And they never saw how wrong it was until Ezra came and began to speak. Well, what happened? We read that when Ezra heard this, he sat down appalled.

Absolutely appalled. And then he prayed one of the great prayers of repentance of the scriptures, turned back to Ezra 9. We've already read it. We don't need to go through it in detail again.

But I want to summarise what sort of prayer it was he prayed in Ezra 9. Verse 5. And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my heaviness. Having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God. I said, Oh my God! My God! I'm ashamed and I'm rushed to lift up my head.

And he began to make confession of Israel's sins as if they were his own. And it's so interesting to see the way in which he made his confession. He made his confession of this sin in the light of the chastening they had already endured for similar things in the past.

Verse 7. Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day. And for our iniquities have we, our kings and our priests, been delivered at the hand of the kings of the lands to soiled captivity and spoil and confusion. Lord! Lord! We're paying with the same thing that already brought us low.

We never would have had this calamity but for the fact we did this thing and it in turn led us to idolatry and away from you. And as we make confession, remember that, you're to confess it in the light of the trouble you've already had, in the light of that dark empty condition, a spiritual condition you had because of compromise, because of sin, because of unbrokenness. And we are playing with the very thing that brought us to such a dire state of need.

Maybe not quite so obvious but a little more polite but it's the same thing. And I'm to judge my sin in the light of the chastening I've already had in my life. I'm playing with the same thing.

Then he judged it also in the light of the measure of revival they'd been given. In verse 8 he says, and now for a little space, grace has been showed us. To leave us a remnant to escape and to give us a little

revival in our bondage.

It isn't tremendous but it's revival all right. But we're prejudicing the whole revival movement as far as we're concerned. The whole thing's at risk.

And man, if you've been playing with sin and compromise, you're risking the very new blessings that God has brought into your life. How terrible. I have to say that to myself, of whom is this not true in one degree or another.

And that in spite that he's already given me a measure of revival in my bondage. Here I am, doing it again. Compromising and justifying it, that's the point.

It says somewhere, if I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me. And I understand it's if I regard with favour iniquity. And in turn I believe regarding iniquity with favour is justifying it.

And there's certain things you justify. That's enough to cause God to hide his face from us again. And then he judged it in the light of further chastening that they might have.

Verses 14 and 15. Wouldst not thou be angry with us till thou consumed us so that there should be no remnant nor escaping? And so it is. I could involve myself in many new chastenings.

I could lose what I gained. I could get into problems. Away from God, left with the shell of a Christian life rather than the real thing.

And so this is his great prayer. I told you there are three great prayers of repentance. Nehemiah 9, Daniel 9 and here, Ezra 9, this Ezra.

I tell you when I hear a man praying like that, he wasn't involved but he said we, not you. And he saw it in its true light. Maybe we don't.

We don't see it in the light of what we've already suffered because of similar failures in the past. We don't see it in the light of the precious new reviving God's begun to give us. And we don't see it in the light of further heavy-handed chastening from God that it might involve.

But oh, he made no excuse. Beautiful confession. It's a beautiful thing.

Charles Bassett talks about the mystic joys of penitence. And although it was full of sorrow, there was an element of joy. Ah, you're getting down to the basic thing that's wrong.

And I want you to see the effect on the people of seeing the effect of their sin upon Ezra. It wasn't so much what he said, it wasn't so much that prayer, but I think the thing that impressed them was what he did. When he heard about this, what did he do? In 9, verse 3, he rent his garment, his mantle, plucked off the hair of his head and beard, and sat down upon.

He really ripped his clothes off. He got hold of his hair and he pulled it out and he pulled off his beard and he sat down upon. What's the matter? I mean, we've rather liked it, these pagan women, they're very attractive.

Oh, I know they have their own little culture things, but we needn't be involved in that, but you will be. And when they saw the effect of what they'd done on Ezra, that really began to touch them. And then, in

chapter 10, verse 1, he says, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God.

And I tell you, I believe it's right to say that when the people in the East weep, they really weep. I believe he howled. They're expressive.

And Hezekiah sat down upon this pole and he began to howl. And you could hear those howls ringing through the streets of Jerusalem. They never thought it was all that bad until they saw how Ezra saw it.

And he howled in sorrow. The thing we've been waiting so long for, for which we needed so much and God's been so good, and now we're again involving ourselves in it. He howled.

And even though they said, look here, don't take it too seriously, we promise we'll put it right. He was very glad to hear them say that. But he went that night to a friend's house and he wouldn't eat.

And in his room he was still mourning. And through that night they heard the howl of grief of this Ezra. And when they began to see the effect it had on Ezra, they began to weep.

They began to howl. And if their determination to put this right was made in that background, then it was something. Now it's a very small step to see in the sorrows of Ezra, the sorrows of a greater than Ezra, because of our sin.

Is it nothing to you, we read in Lamentations, or ye that pass by, behold and see if there any sorrows like unto mine sorrows, wherewith the Lord has afflicted me in the day of his fierce act? O Christ, what burdens, bow thy head, our load was laid on thee. And these very things that he's trying to talk to you about, these playing, these small perhaps compromises, cost him that, and I will never really see them as they really are, and repent of them deeply, until I see them in the light of what it cost Jesus to put them away, those sorrows. That affliction was for these very things, and yet it can be nothing to me who pass by, but when it does seem, then the same effect is had on us as in the story.

There's a verse in Zechariah, which speaks of a coming day, when this is going to be wonderfully true of Israel, even as a nation, Zechariah 12, verse 9, and it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem, and I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplications, and look at this, listen, and they shall look upon me, whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourned for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one is in bitterness for his firstborn. They're not mourning for what sin has cost them, they're mourning for what sin has cost their Messiah. In evil on I took delight, unawed by shame or fear, till a new object met my sight, and stopped my mad career.

I saw one hanging on a tree in agonies and blood, as near the cross I stood. Sure, never to my latest breath, can I forget that look. It seemed to charge me with his death, though not a word he spoke.

My conscience felt, and owned its guilt, and plunged me in despair. I saw my sins his blood had spilt, and helped to nail him there. A second look he gave, which said, I freely or forgive, this blood is for thy ransom shed.

I die, that thou mayst live. Thus, while his death, my sin displays, in all its blackish hue, such as the mystery of grace, it seals my pardon too. Those are the words that John Newton, writer of Amazing Grace, and many another hymn wrote.

I saw my sins his blood had spilt. And I tell you, that's it. As they saw the effect of this sin upon Ezra, they too began to weep.

They too saw it in the same light. I remember years ago hearing about a dear friend of mine, Bishop Chandu Ray, who used to be in Pakistan, I think he's now in Singapore, a great spiritual leader. But he was involved in some controversies and so on, and probably not wrongly, I imagine they were important, but it would seem that his spirit had got wrong in the process.

And one day he came back to his bungalow, and there he saw Mrs Ray, she's dead now, he's mad again. He saw his first wife, prostrate on the ground, weeping. He said, what are you weeping for? He said, I'm weeping for you.

Me? It's the other people who've been so wrong. Oh Chandu, I'm so concerned for you. What is doing to you and your attitude? And as he saw his wife's grief, he saw his own sin, and he was helped to take the place of a penitent.

How much more true is it when I see Calvary again? This very book of Zechariah says, Awake a sword against my shepherd. Do you know that verse, Zechariah 13, 7, just look at it. It's the verse on which the hymn we've sung is based.

Zechariah 13, 7, Awake a sword against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow saith the Lord of hosts, smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. Whoever can be described as the fellow of Jehovah, if it isn't Jesus. Awake, O sword against my shepherd, against the man that is my fellow, and only made necessary for you.

Moses suffered, because he lost his temper, and smote the rock twice, and was forbidden to enter. And when he tells the story in Deuteronomy, he says, the Lord was angry for me, with me, for your sake. What does that mean? He was angry for you, for your sake.

No, no, it was really for their sakes. You see, they've been losing their tempers with one another, many times, never thought anything of it. But when this was seen to happen in a Moses, and he was forbidden to enter that land, the crowning thing of his life, they saw sin in its real light.

And I think Jesus can say to you and me, the Lord was angry with me, for your sake. If the moment he took my place and my sin, God had to forsake his son, what was my sin being? We must look on him whom we have pierced. And sometimes you've got to see other people so concerned about you.

Somehow the thought of Jesus, that's too far off, or something, got you too used to it. But that grief is reflected in those that care for yourself, and in the light of it. God help you and me, you see.

Well, they did respond. I'll just take a minute more, a minute or two more. And they said, oh, don't be so sad, there's hope.

We'll get them all together, we'll put this right. And he made them swear. And he intended to, and he actually did.

But that night he didn't quit mourning, he didn't quit meeting, merely putting it right, putting away those pagan wives and so on. It wasn't enough. The thing had been done.

What had been done was enough, to incur the displeasure of the Almighty and make them subject to his disciplinary anger. And so he went on. And dear friend, it's not enough for you to put it right.

It's not enough for you to make whatever adjustments you know you ought to make, to quit something. It's already been happening. And sin always leaves the legacy of guilt, which is before God.

And your repentance, frankly, isn't enough. Well, you see, if my repentance isn't enough to put a thing right, why the world is? Why the world could wash away my stain, if my sorrow for it, and my repentance concerning of it isn't. I tell you, you know, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

This isn't in the story. But it's interesting, although they said they'd put it right, he wasn't rejoicing. Had he seen something of what we know, the blood of Jesus, he could say there really is hope.

And I suppose somehow he knew God was a gracious God, there won't be hope if they repented. But just get that. Determining not to do it again, determining to put a thing right, isn't enough.

It's already happened. Only one thing can really put it right with God. Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

What one hymn calls the wrath, appeasing blood of Jesus. That's what you got in that hymn. That sword has been sheathed in the breast of Jesus.

It's done. And I want to tell you, there is hope. Yes, there is hope.

Hope of the tree be cut down and sprout again. Hope. On the other hand, things got to be put right.

Took him two months to do it. But even doing that, doesn't really put it right with God, but the blood of Jesus does. It is not my prayers of repentance or tears, but the blood that atones for the soul.

On him then who shed it, I mayest at once my weight of iniquities roll.

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