

# Ezra's confession and prayer (Quality: Very good)

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Preacher: Hyde, Leslie S B (1916-2001)

- [ 0 : 00 ] As the Lord may help me this evening, I will direct your attention to the book of Ezra, the ninth chapter, verses five and six.
- The book of Ezra, the ninth chapter, verses five and six. And at the evening sacrifice, I arose 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 said, O my God, I am ashamed, and blush 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.
- The nation of Israel is typical of spiritual Israel in many respects.
- And God dealt with the nation of Israel in some respects as he does with his people.
- [ 1 : 37 ] Those things which happened in these days of Ezra are written for our learning, and a great deal of importance should be laid upon some of these points.
- The thing that troubled Israel is something which has little effect upon the multitudes today.
- That which troubled Ezra in a very particular way was the fact that Israel had not separated themselves as they should have done.
- Contrary to God's instruction, these things were done. 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, the Perizzites, and so on.
- For they have taken of their daughters for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands.
- [ 3 : 11 ] This question of mixed marriages has been a great point in God setting before them those things that they should have taken notice of.
- And because they did not take notice of it, they came into a great deal of trouble. We have the scriptures.
- Can we sometimes sit down and think, well, I've come into a great deal of trouble. because I've not taken notice of what the Word of God says.
- To take notice of what the Word of God says is of far greater importance than taking notice of anyone else to the law and to the Testament.
- If they speak not according to this, it is because there is no light in them. One of the worst features of this news that was brought to Ezra's attention was that not only had the people been engaged in this affair, but the priests and the Levites had also been involved.
- [ 4 : 48 ] Now, there are many things that point us to this part of the scripture when we look at the matter of the things that are taking place today.
- And because people are unaware of the scriptures, therefore, they are hardened in their hearts and they stub those that will bring the attention, their attention, to the scriptures.

But what we have before us in our text is something which was personal to Ezra.

And we may say that with all that we may see going on in the land, it's our personal feeling in regard to it.

The poet has a well-known verse, To see sin smarts but slightly, to own with lip confession, is easier still, but oh to feel cuts deep beyond expression.

[ 6 : 16 ] Now there's no doubt about it that Ezra, he was cut to the heart, he felt deeply with that which was going on around him.

And as we read in the words of our text, he associated himself with it. This distinguishes a person that is truly exercised and deeply concerned even for national affairs and church affairs from the Pharisee who would say, Come not nigh me for I am holier than thou.

And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness or my affection as the Bargain suggests.

so then it had been a day of heaviness, it had been a day of affliction, there had been the morning sacrifice, and the offering of the lamb, and the meat offering, and so on, and now it had come to the time of the evening sacrifice.

And all during this day at least we may well consider that Ezra's heart was heavy. Heavy because he thought upon one dreadful thing that had brought the Lord's displeasure upon the nation and was responsible if not entirely to a large degree in bringing the judgments of God upon them.

[ 8 : 12 ] We should find that we were in a very solemn case if we were under the rule of a foreign power, or if we were carried away from our own beloved country to serve under a foreign power.

Now it's no use blaming the foreign power. The Jews or if we will become the Jews to have blamed the foreign power that brought them under their rule it was God.

God bringing them into this place and that it should be seventy years wherein God's wrath will be revealed.

And yet there were those in Israel the salt of the earth in Israel that preserved them alive and so there was much mercy mixed even with the judgments that were upon Israel and Judah for their sins.

mercy now the mercy of God is manifested in a number of ways and not least when the people of God are exercised about the things that are coming upon the earth.

[ 9 : 51 ] Now I do not mean by that remark that they are necessarily afraid but they see in these things the holiness of God.

They see that he is high and righteous full of majesty. They see too how much of the second psalm is being verified before their eyes day by day.

Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed saying let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cause from us.

Now surely that is clearly demonstrated in the spirit in the world today. Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cause in us.

And if our eyes are open we've only to look round we shall not have to go very far to see the spirit which is in the world today which is just this of breaking away from God's laws casting them to one side but what does the scripture say?

[ 11 : 25 ] He that sitteth in the heaven shall love and the Lord shall have them into region then shall he speak unto them in his wrath and vex them in his sore display and it is good for us to think to think along these lines and to ponder and it may well bring us into heaviness of spirit and also affliction of spirit from the words of the scripture before us how heavy was this burden upon the heart of Ezra he demonstrated the feelings of his heart by a common practice in those days and having rent my garment and my mantle this was to indicate their deep feeling go a little later on warns the people not to rend their heart and their garment because that could be just superficial and meaningless but to rend their hearts

I fell upon my knees and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God and so Ezra was in the attitude of worship now when we're in the attitude of worship what will be chiefly before us is God's greatness and God's glory we can read in other parts of the word of God where the saints of God they fell upon their knees and they stretched out their hands unto the Lord God an evidence of worship an acknowledgement of God's greatness now when we write the made confession to God we shall have this spiritual feeling about

God's greatness there is a line two lines there are two lines in our hymn book and if my soul were sent to hell thy righteous Lord approves it well and what could Ezra say he was dependent upon the mercy of God and yet in the ceremonial sacrifices in which he himself might well have been engaged in some respect he saw the mercy of God revealed the law on Sinai was filled with condemnation the ceremonial law that accompanied that moral law directed to Christ to those people in the godly they directed to the lamb that should come the lamb of

God slain from the foundation of the world the Messiah they could not see it very clearly but nevertheless here was their hope and now Ezra he had been present of the morning sacrifice when the lamb was offered and now he is present of the evening sacrifice when the lamb was offered do we consider in our own meditations the necessity of the lamb morning and evening it is not necessary to engage in the ceremonial law because that has been fulfilled in Christ but do we feel the need of Christ's blood to cleanse us Christ's blood to cover us

Christ's blood to bring us nigh I fell upon my knees and he worshipped God but this spreading out of his hands unto the Lord my God gives us a little indication of the direction in which his thoughts were moving now are we in such a place sometimes when we would stretch out our hands even unto God to show the direction of our faith looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith well this was a clear demonstration in the attitude of Ezra in this time of great distress and now we come to the words that

[ 17 : 03 ] Ezra uttered and said oh my God I am ashamed well this is an emotion this is a feeling what would make him ashamed perhaps you can answer it when you say well I know what has made me ashamed often that which makes us ashamed is in a word neglect oh what neglect us we are many how many things that should be done we have left we've left undone this word I am ashamed came over with such force this afternoon and you know there's so many things in which

I would have to say and I would venture some of you would have to say that I am ashamed people may regard you in a different light they may go so far as to say well what have you got to be ashamed of ah the heart knoweth its own bitterness who can intermed with its joys ashamed because of our carnality ashamed because of our neglect of the throne of grace of reading the word of god of meditating upon the things of god and being entangled with things otherwise ah but people may say I've watched you very carefully and I shouldn't think that you've had any reason to be ashamed you are a reader of the word

I'm sure you pray ah let the heart knoweth its own bitterness it's not what we are before men it's what we are before god you see Ezra was speaking to his god god who had brought this work in him the word of god tells us that the wicked know no shame and we shall not have to go very far to make this see this this is clearly true they know no shame the people of god do the people looking at the people of god may be ready to say and would say I don't see what you've got to be ashamed about ah there's the glory of god have we given god the glory which is due to his great name

I am ashamed and have we loved god as we as he deserves to be loved I am ashamed have we paid attention to his commandments as they should have been attended to I am ashamed have I been engaged in speaking as in the days of the book of Malachi one to another and speaking of the things of god I am ashamed but although this is recorded it is recorded because the spirit of god caused to be recorded how much of this was not vocally spoken we cannot exactly say but we know this that these kind of expressions and prayers are not easily vocally expressed we do not stand up in the public prayer meeting and speak from the depth of our hearts as we sometimes do when we are on our own oh my god i am ashamed and will blush to lift up my face to thee now when we blush it is because we have a sense of guilt there is no need to blush unless we have a sense of guilt now you see here was a man an honorable man a worthy man by the grace of god and yet he had a sense of guilt and it made him blush that was the way he expressed it it may not have been the physical raising of color in his cheeks but he felt it he blushed to lift up my face to thee and therefore we can understand that his face hung down he would with his heart look up but his face hung down in much the same way as the publicans did he could not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven but he said god be merciful to me a sinner how good it is to have a religion that seeks the mercy of god you see some can see the sins in others and they fail to observe the sins in themselves we can say that

Ezra saw the sins in others because it was so apparent as being contrary to the law but he identified himself with them and he could well have said there go I but for the grace of god I should have been involved in a mixed marriage had it not have been for the preserving mercy of god my god one that he had dealt with before one that he knew by the covenant of grace they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest of them and one thing that he knew was this that god was holy and that's why he felt ashamed and god was holy and that's why he could not lift up his face to thee my god his confession is bounded on either side by my god aren't our confessions sometimes bounded on either side people may say well it's just vain repetition and it's nervousness and so on wasn't so in this case and it isn't always so when people may utter my god at the start of the sentence and conclude with my god at the end of the sentence they need god at the beginning and they need god at the end and they need not only a god a god of the intelligence of the mind but my god the one that has made himself known unto me the one that has given to me his grace now

[ 25 : 33 ] Ezra had the grace of god otherwise he would not have been disturbed by these mixed marriages he would have been willing to shoulder it off as others would shoulder it off he would not have been disturbed by the judgments of god he would have found some excuse as many do today how many do we see can we speak about ourselves that tremble because of the holiness of god when we see things happening how much hardness and unfeeling mess there is in our spirit so that things come and things go and we are caught up with the spirit of the world the apathy in the world and then suddenly god brings us into that place where we are suddenly aware of our guilt oh my god i am ashamed and blushed to lift up my face my god now it's no use ezra you're coming to god unless you have faith in god because why are you coming in this way and why are you blushing and why are you ashamed is it because you feel so deeply your sins but what is the purpose what will you get by coming to god do you expect to get pardon do you expect to get forgiveness surely ezra came with expectation and he expected he hoped perhaps he hoped against hope that the lord would have mercy upon him for our iniquities are increased over our head and now this part of the verse clearly indicates that ezra identified himself with the other people it was not their iniquities not even the iniquities of the priests and the levites but it is our iniquities one sins one has sinned then all have sinned we take it in respect to the church of god then the church of god is regarded as the body of christ now if one member suffers they all suffer and if one member should confess my iniquities are increased over my head then because of the unity of the spirit that affects the rest of the body our iniquities are increased over our head there was no half measures no suggesting that we'd gone a little wrong here and perhaps a little wrong there no the word is for for our iniquities now we are sinners and we sin in one way and another and our common sin is that we give not the glory that is due to the lord so often and maybe

there is much more at least in the spiritual view of it of the mixed marriages than we ever realize I ever after idols ran but now my gods are a martyred man they are they are increased over our head and our trespass is grown up under the heaven again the margin suggests for the word trespass guiltiness now you see guilt is that which rises and gets bigger and bigger and so the words are very apt increased over our heads and grown up under the heaven and it was very real to

Ezra but let us come to ourselves do we confess our sins but do we feel that our iniquities increased over our heads do we feel that our trespass is grown up under the heavens only when God brings it home to us and we cannot confess sin without feeling that we have sin to confess now the sin that was confessed here was certainly marked out with action that had been taken but you see that wasn't the beginning of it that was the end product what about the thoughts that went before before these people engaged in the abominations of these other lands with whom they had now mixed well it will go take us back to the garden of Eden where disobedience in

Eve and Adam under the temptation of Satan became something that was attractive how astonishing it is that it could ever be said that disobedience was attractive but must it not be so if it is unattractive then should we follow a disobedient course people are disobedient we are all disobedient so far in many things but are we conscious of our disobedience to such an extent that our iniquities are increased and our trespass our guilt is grown up under the heavens you see because of the hardness of the heart of men they are disobedient the apostle said

I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision what a mercy that was for him but can we say that concerning everybody I have a heavenly vision they see perhaps in their vision Christ Jesus crucified on the cross and it may be that they also see in that heavenly vision father forgive them for they know not what they do and whilst they stand in trance with that heavenly vision they are ready to say what love is before me on such love my soul till ponder so on and so on but what does the heavenly vision say if you love me keep my commandments and are we disobedient to the heavenly vision and as that goes on day by day so it's not one moment's disobedience it's not one out of days disobedience it's been disobedience multiplied day in and day out perhaps year in and year out but there's been the heavenly vision and there's been the word before us and perhaps sounding in our ears if you love me keep my commandments and when the spirit of god begins to work with the power of conviction we shall feel just like ezra speaks here oh my god i am ashamed and blessed to lift up my face to thee my god and yet you see he came to god there was no one else he could come to and if we're disobedient what shall we do well we shall either despair and perish in our sins or we shall venture saying i can perish if i go i am resolved to try for if i stay away i know i must forever die disobedience has been spoken about continually in the scriptures and if we think that we are under no circumstances disobedient then we shall have to look again the inmost desire of the soul quickened by the grace of god is to be obedient it is no mark of grace to be disobedient but it is a mark of grace if we are made conscious of the iniquity of our disobedience it involves idolatry it involves our following after the alternative and this is what was given to adam and eve in the garden of eden an alternative they'd never thought about it before hath god said you shall not die you shall not surely die you shall be as gods and before they were aware they were taken in the snare and they were down and

[ 37 : 16 ] they were soon in the place of ezra i am ashamed adam is condemned out of his own mouth because the lord came the lord god said the lord came unto adam and he said why art thou he said i heard thy voice in the garden and i was afraid because i was naked and i hid myself and he said that is god said who told thee that thou was naked hast thou eaten of the tree whereof i commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat and so excuses began to flow adam blamed eve and eve blamed the serpent but it had been disobedience and they were ashamed otherwise adam would not have hidden himself so it all stems from disobedience and a desire to serve oneself instead of serving god in which case we are left in a place a state of idolatry worshipping the creature rather than the creator now

Ezra was guilty of this because you see they disregarded what god had said they engaged in these mixed marriages contrary to what god had said now if we've engaged in things contrary to what god has said and have become disobedient then when god begins to bring us to a place of repentance as only he can and it may well be at the time of the evening sacrifice when just a glimpse by faith is seen of a lamb slave what does it mean a lamb slave a suffering christ one that is willing to lay down his life for my sin my heaviness my disobedience my iniquity my trespassing guiltiness that has grown up to heaven repentance the seeds of repentance can be seen in the words of our text this evening and repentance is a very vital part of christian experience how differently we should see the church of god today if there was more repentance there's a great deal of pursuit after many things that are so many what should we call it peripherals the pieces outside the main part and people hang on to these and they make more of these than christ himself they make more of these than the word of god itself but when god deals with a sinner then he will say now you've been taken up with this you've been taken up maybe with good arguments you say well i'm doing this to defend god now god doesn't need defending somebody's got to speak up for him people may say this might come up into your heart sometimes but god doesn't need anyone to speak up for him and while you've been occupied in this way so your heart has been drawn away from the great need of repentance the whole burden of the preaching of our lord jesus for christ revolves around just this one word repent repent repent and then he goes on to have this and believe the gospel i feel in the present day there is little believing the gospel and it is because there is little repentance we do not believe the gospel we do not repent as long as we endeavor to patch things up by our own doings we'll try and do better we won't do this again we'll get out of this trouble and then we'll start afresh that won't do you see we have an example here what happens when god works the spirit of repentance in the soul there is a

falling down and there is a spreading out my hands unto the lord my god god that had been known and not only a god who had been known on mount sinai but god would also be known a little time after when he himself proclaimed his great name and in proclaiming his great name he spoke that he was the god that was full of mercy and compassion in the book of exodus we find that the lord as it were causes moises to stand aside the lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the lord now that will be a good experience for any of god's servants for them to be silent while the mighty god comes and stands by them and proclaims the name of the lord the lord passed by before him and proclaimed the lord the lord god merciful and gracious long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth keeping mercy for thousands forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin our natures cannot stretch up to that kind of proclamation we need the grace of god to speak about the grace of god we need to have the gospel settled in our own hearts before we can begin to speak about the gospel to others it is to be feared that there are many preachers of the lord today he will say do this and do that and if you do the other but this is the power of the spirit when we are ashamed and when we blush because of what we feel it is to believe the gospel and the gospel is just this that the lord is merciful and gracious now our nature doesn't appreciate that it isn't like that if god was to say now you do a penance if god was to say to us now

I'm going to lay great pain upon you and if you can endure it I will accept it we should find that our natural part would say well I'm glad that I can do something but that's not believing the gospel believing the gospel when we blush and when we're ashamed is when we fall down before god and acknowledge and not only acknowledge but rejoice in this great truth that the lord god is merciful and gracious and there is long suffering and abandoning goodness and truth now as for by the grace of god he speaks about my god and he begins his address oh my god what did he know about god must we not feel that this is what he knew about god that god was merciful and if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins we need a great deal of grace to believe the gospel of jesus christ but there is a repentance not only a repentance over our sins but also a repentance of our leaning to the law that well if we do this then god will be favourable to us it is good when the fruits of the spirit are made known and become active in our hearts so the things that we do we do because we love god but the things that we do are not done in order that we might obtain favour with god the lord god merciful and gracious there are two important words and do we need them this evening merciful and gracious if our minds wander if our bodies are overcome with the infirmities of the bodies what do we need we do not have to go outside of the hour and a half that we're in the house of god here to be ashamed and to blush but it is a mercy if when we feel ashamed and we blush that we stretch out our hands to god though we may not physically fall upon our knees yet our heart is down and then we remember and oh how good it is when the gospel comes into your soul and we remember and though my sins deserving hell

I'll not despair for who can tell that god will turn and be gracious to us because after all he is the lord he has proclaimed his name himself and he is gracious and he is merciful and he is long suffering now this is a great blessing if we prove this to be true is this your god the one that you adore the one that you rejoice in are you agitated sometimes because the devil says that won't do you've got to do something yes you have you've got to repent of depending upon the law for your salvation you've got to turn from the law to the gospel how will you do that it is god that worketh in you both the will and the do of his good pleasure and here is hope for the sinner that is down being ashamed and blushing because of the shame felt that there is abundance in god abundance in christ the mercy of the lord is from everlasting too everlasting there can never be any cessation of mercy