

When Sin Is Taken Seriously

I. Announce:

- A. Slide1-3 Bloom Talks. VBS. Prayer.
- B. *Welcome to those **online**.
- C. Slide4 Prayer:

II. Slide5 Intro: When Sin Is Taken Seriously

- A. Theme: Renewal begins with honest repentance.
 1. Here we find **the theological heart** of the book.
- B. Big Idea: God restores His people when they stop excusing sin & start confessing it.
 1. When was the last time you felt *real conviction*? What was it about? How did you respond? Did it lead to change or *just regret*?
- C. Up to this point, the story has been encouraging. The temple has been **rebuilt**. The people have **returned**. Ezra has arrived with **God's Word**.
- D. Then comes a shocking report: The people, including many leaders, have **compromised** God's commands *through intermarriage* with the surrounding pagan nations. The issue is not ethnicity but spiritual compromise. The very **sins** that led Israel into exile are beginning to reappear.
 1. Ezra realizes that **rebuilding the temple** means little if *hearts remain unchanged*. [While the people had erected a new temple and celebrated the Passover, their moral vision as God's special people had been lost]
 2. A rebuilt temple without a renewed heart is not true **revival**!
- E. This evening we are going to talk about racial/mixed marriages. Let's clarify a few things: **Ask**: Is it ok today for racial/mixed marriages? Was it ok during Ezra's time? Why or why not? (Messiah's bloodline [nationality/Jew; tribe/Judah; ancestry/son of David]. And Israel's idolatry issues).
 1. The Bible teaches **one human race** descended from Adam. Yet, in the story of redemption, God often speaks of **2 groups**: **Jews and Gentiles**.

2. **Israel** was the covenant people through whom the Messiah would come, **and** the **Gentiles** were all the nations outside Israel.
3. **Then**, through Christ, God creates *one new people* from both groups - the **Church**. The **gospel** *doesn't erase ethnicity*; it **unites** people *from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation* into **one family in Christ**. [Paul says, *Give no offense, either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.* 1 Cor. 10:32]
 - a) **End times debates**: large part depends on *your understanding of Israel*.
 - b) God is through with Israel/Jews, and the church is now spiritual Israel. **Or**, God is **not** through with Israel, **&** the church is **new & distinct from** Israel.

III. Slide6a 1. **CONVICTION BEGINS WHEN WE SEE SIN CLEARLY (1-4)**

- A. **1** After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, *"The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. 2 For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has **mixed** itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost."* **3** As soon as I heard this, I **tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled**. **4** **Then** all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered around me while I **sat appalled** until the evening sacrifice.
- B. **Ezra's Leaders** took oversight of the flock - *Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to **shepherd** the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*
- C. **What was the problem with interracial marriage?** The problem was not only the women's **ethnicity**, **but their religious beliefs** which would influence the community
 1. The returned exiles took foreign wives because *they had forgotten their special place in God's plan*; their **sin** was **vertical** before it was horizontal.

- D. Ezra is devastated - What were the 3 ways he expressed his grief? - He tears his garment. He pulls hair from his head and beard. He sits astonished.
1. These were **visible signs** of **deep grief** and **mourning**. (anger vs. grief)
- E. We often live in a culture that: *Excuses sin. Renames sin. Normalizes sin. Even celebrates sin.*
1. Ezra shows us that **spiritual health begins when we see sin the way God sees it.**
- F. **Illustration:** If a doctor discovers **cancer**, he doesn't *celebrate it, rename it, or ignore it*. He identifies it so *healing* can begin.
1. **Slide6b** ***Conviction is God's mercy exposing what is destroying us.**
- G. Christ Connection: **The seriousness of sin** is seen most clearly **at the cross**.
1. If **sin** were **small**, *Christ maybe would have just taken on a head cold for us.* (**He** would not have needed to **die**).
- H. Jesus did not come because sin was *insignificant*. He came because it was **deadly**.

IV. Slide7 **2. REPENTANCE OWNS RESPONSIBILITY (5-10)**

- A. **5** And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garment and my cloak torn, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God, **6** saying: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for **our iniquities** have risen higher than our heads, and **our guilt** has mounted up to the heavens. **7** From the days of our fathers to this day **we have been in great guilt**. **And** for **our iniquities** we, our kings, and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plundering, and to utter shame, as it is today. **8** **But** now for a brief moment **favor** has been shown by the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant and to give us a secure hold within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our slavery. **9** For **we are slaves**. **Yet** our *God has not forsaken us in our slavery*, **but** **has extended to us his steadfast love** before the kings of Persia, to grant us some reviving to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection

in Judea and Jerusalem. **10** “And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For **we have forsaken** your commandments,

B. One of the most striking features of Ezra's prayer is **his language**.

1. He says: **"Our iniquities."** **"Our guilt."** **"we have been in great guilt."**
 - a) Yet Ezra was not personally guilty of this particular sin.
 - b) Ezra **identifies with** God's people rather than **distancing himself from** them.
2. He does not say: **"Their problem."** **"Those people."** **"Those leaders."**
3. Instead he says: **"We"** - **This is biblical corporate responsibility**.
 - a) **Not** personal blame for another's actions, **but** a willingness to share the burden of **spiritual decline** among God's people.

C. **Our culture specializes in blame shifting**: *Adam blamed Eve. Eve blamed the serpent. We blame circumstances.*

1. ***Repentance begins when excuses end.**

D. **Illustration**: The fastest way to **stay stuck** is to **explain away** every failure.

1. The first step **toward freedom** is **honest ownership**.

E. **What stands out most to you about Ezra's response to sin?**

1. **Why do you think we** tend to minimize or excuse sin?
2. **What's the difference between conviction and condemnation?**
3. **How does God's grace** encourage honest confession?
4. **Where might God be convicting you today?**

V. Slide8a **3. GRACE MAKES REPENTANCE POSSIBLE (8,9)**

A. **8** **But** now for a brief moment **favor** has been shown by the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant and to give us a secure hold within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our slavery. **9** For **we are slaves**. **Yet** our *God has not forsaken us in our slavery*, **but** has extended to us his **steadfast love** before the kings of Persia, to grant us some reviving to set up the

house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem.

B. In the middle of his prayer Ezra remembers **God's mercy**.

1. The people deserve judgment. **Instead: God preserved a remnant. God brought them home. God allowed them to rebuild. God gave them another opportunity.**
2. **Biblical repentance is never hopeless. Repentance grows in the soil of grace.** We confess *because God is merciful*.

C. **Slide8b The cross tells us 2 truths at the same time:** Our **sin** is worse than we thought. **And God's grace** is greater than we imagined.

1. **This tension** - between **judgment for sin and mercy extended** - frames the chapter's ultimate message.
 - a) The same **Savior** who **convicts us** also **forgives us**. **Jesus** bore our sin **fully** so we can confess it **honestly**.

VI. **Slide9 4. RENEWAL HAPPENS WHEN BROKENNESS LEADS TO CHANGE (10-15)**

A. **10** “And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments, **11** which you commanded by your servants the prophets, saying, ‘The land that you are entering, to take possession of it, is a land impure with the impurity of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations that have filled it from end to end with their uncleanness. **12** Therefore do not give your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters for your sons, and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever.’ **13** And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, seeing that you, our God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserved and have given us such a remnant as this, **14** shall we break your commandments again and intermarry with the peoples who practice these abominations? Would you not be angry with us until you consumed us, so that there should be no remnant, nor any to escape? **15** O LORD, the God of Israel, you

are just, for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as it is today. Behold, we are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this.”

B. **Ezra's prayer ends with humility.** *No excuses. No demands. No bargaining.*

1. Here we are before You in our guilt. **Ezra leaves himself entirely in God's hands.**

C. **Conviction is not the goal, transformation is.**

1. **Many people feel bad** about sin. **Far fewer turn** from it. **Godly sorrow leads somewhere.**

2. 2 Corinthians 7:10 ***Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted.*** - **Real conviction produces real change.**

D. **Don't Minimize Sin:** *What have I been excusing? What have I been tolerating? What have I stopped fighting? ouch.*

1. Practice Confession by keeping *short accounts* with God.

2. **Confession is not weakness. It is spiritual honesty.**

VII.Slide10 **CHRIST CONNECTION**

A. **Ezra** sat overwhelmed by the guilt of God's people.

Jesus carried the guilt of God's people.

B. **Ezra** tore his garments. **Jesus** had His garments divided at the cross.

C. **Ezra** prayed for mercy. **Jesus** became the mercy we needed.

1. **The answer** to Ezra's prayer is ultimately found **in Christ**, who ***bore our sin completely and offers forgiveness, cleansing, and renewal.***

D. **Prayer:** Father, give us soft hearts. Help us see sin the way You see it. Keep us from excusing what grieves You. Thank You that Jesus bore our sin completely and offers forgiveness freely. Lead us from conviction to repentance, and from repentance to lasting change.

E. Keywords: Sin, conviction, responsibility.