­Lam Chow Siong #85 Speaker 12

**Text: Ezra 10: 1-17**

**Questions to ask:**

1. Who is Ezra? Who is he speaking to?

Ans: Ezra is a priest/prophet speaking to post-exilic Jews who had returned to Jerusalem after being brought into exile in Babylon.

1. Why is he weeping before the house of God?

Ans: He is weeping as his people, including some priests and Levites, have committed a grievous sin of marrying pagan women with ‘detestable practices’ (9v1).

1. Who is Shecaniah? What are his words to Ezra?

Ans: He is a respected leader among his people. He encourages Ezra to act according to the Law and pledges to give Ezra full support for his plans.

1. What does the Law require the people to do?

Ans: The Law requires the people to be separated from foreign women and their children.

1. Why does Ezra do before he acts?

Ans: Ezra undertakes a personal fast from food and water (v6).

1. How much time does Ezra give the people to assemble in Jerusalem? Why?

Ans: Three days. Because Ezra wants to deal with the sin urgently. It does not take more than two days for people to travel from their homes to Jerusalem. The greatest distance would have been no more than 40-50 miles (v7-9).

1. What does Ezra ask the people to do? How do the people respond?

Ans: Ezra asks the people to confess their sin and separate themselves from their foreign wives and the foreign community. The people agree to his command (v10-12).

1. How long does it take for all who have married foreign wives to be interrogated in their own towns? Why? Ans: Three full months of interrogation. There are many people to deal with. The weather is rainy and cold as well (v 13-17).

**Exegetical Outline**

Exegetical Idea: The way God used Ezra to lead a spiritual revival among the post-exilic Jews was through (a) prayer and fasting, (b) confession, and (c) righteous actions.

I. The way God used Ezra to lead a spiritual revival among the post-exilic Jews was through prayer and fasting (v1-6).

1. Ezra led a spiritual revival among the post-exilic Jews through personal prayer and fasting (v1,6).
2. Ezra gained the support of other Jewish leaders such as Shecaniah, the leading priests and Levites (v2-5).

II. The way God used Ezra to lead the Jewish believers to return to God was through confession of their sin and taking appropriate actions (v7-17).

1. Ezra led the Jewish believers to return to God through a public declaration of their sin of marrying pagan women (v10-11a).
2. Ezra led the Jewish believers to return to God through a public declaration of their need to separate themselves from their foreign wives (v11b).
3. The Jewish believers responded positively to Ezra’s call for confession and action (v12-14).
4. The Jewish believers acted on the call to separate themselves from their foreign wives (v16-17).

Lam Chow Siong (Box #85) -Revised copy Speaker 12

**Return to God: Confess and Separate**

**Ezra 10: 1-17 (cyclical deductive)**

**Purpose: To urge believers to return to God through confession of sin and separating themselves from the source of sin.**

**Introduction**

1. **Arouse interest**: Show a picture of a red apple and ask, “Would you like to eat this apple?” Then, show a picture of the apple being halved, with a worm in its core, and ask, “Would you still like to eat this apple?”
2. **Need**: Most of us look good on the outside, but harbour a secret sin within. We need to deal with the sin urgently and not allow it to cause us to rot from within.
3. **Main Idea**: Return to God: Confess and Separate
4. **Background**: Ezra was a priest/prophet chosen by God to lead the post-exilic Jews who had returned from Babylon to Judah to repent of their sin of marrying foreign women. Ezra fasted and prayed before he led the people to confess their sin and to return to God. Now what should the people do?
5. **Preview**: Today’s text tells us the way God used Ezra to lead a spiritual revival among the post-exilic Jews. First Ezra went into a time of personal prayer and fasting, then Ezra asked the people to confess their sin and to take actions.

**I. Spiritual revivals begin with prayer and fasting (10:1-6)**

 A. Spiritual revivals begin with prayer (10:1).

 B. Spiritual revivals spread to others (102,5).

 C. Spiritual revivals begin with fasting(10:6).

**II. Spiritual revivals lead us back to God through confession and actions (v7-17).**

1. Spiritual revivals lead us back to God through confessing our sin (v11a).
2. Spiritual revivalslead us back to God through taking actions (v11b).

**Conclusion**

1. To return to God, you must confess your sin and remove the source of sin (Main Idea restated).
2. Do you need a spiritual revival? Ask the Holy Spirit to point out your sin for you. Confess your sin and take actions now (link it back to the worm in the rotten apple).
3. To truly love God, we must not only study the word of God faithfully, but also constantly examine our hearts and ask God to help us remove our sins.

**Sermon on Ezra 10:1-17 (full script)**

**RETURN TO GOD: Confess and Separate**

Good morning, brothers and sisters, it is a privilege for me to speak to you this morning. I trust that you have had a good breakfast this morning. However, how many of you would not mind having this apple (shown on ppt) as part of your breakfast, or even lunch? Well, what if this apple is rotten (next picture shown on ppt), with a big worm in its core? Would you still want to have it?

We human beings tend to judge things and people on the outside without due consideration for what is happening inside. Inside this apple is a worm that would cause the apple to rot.

Take another object as an example. (Show ppt on trees). The tree on the left looks majestic and sturdy, unshakable even. However, this grand old tree can also fall all of a sudden, like this tree in the Botanic Gardens which fell and caused a person to die in Feb 2017. Some bacteria in the tree had caused it to rot internally.

As for Christians and even church leaders, we too can be felled by some sin that we cherish in our hearts. Note that the centre of the word ‘SIN’ is “I”. The desire for self-gratification usually leads one to sin. In the case of City Harvest Church, its leader Kong Hee desired his wife to be successful in her music career, and that led to his and his fellow leaders’ downfall.

When we survey the Bible, we see God’s interest to deal with his chosen people’s sins and to restore their relationship with Him. From Adam and Eve to the days of Noah to the period of the OT prophets, to Jesus and the apostle Paul in the NT, God is continually dealing with people’s sins.

In the book of Ezra, the people of God were given the freedom to return from their exile in Babylon. They took a physical journey of about 4 months from Babylon to Jerusalem; however, they were to take another spiritual journey internally, in their hearts, led by Ezra the priest.

Human nature does not change; it is sinful and has the propensity to sin, whatever the given culture and time. During Ezra’s days, the people sinned against God by marrying pagan wives (Deut 7:3-4) and adopting their detestable practices such as worshipping idols and sacrificing their children. In today’s context, people sin by practicing co-habitation (common in many Scandinavian countries) and legalizing gay marriage (many European countries, many states in the US, Canada—countries that were once considered Christian nations).

Let us examine in Ezra 10 how God deals with the people’s sins.

Firstly, God chooses a leader who is willing to stand in the gap for the people. He is willing to humble himself to pray for his people, and to undergo a fast to show his weakness and his dependence on God. Ezra “wept bitterly” (v1) in the house of God, and his actions touched the people who also wept together with him. Apart from praying and weeping, Ezra also took upon himself to fast (v6), so that he might draw strength from God to confront the people of their sins. As a priest, Ezra was faithful to his duty to bring the people back to God.

To confront others of their sins is not an enviable task. Chapter 10 tells us that among those who married foreign women were the descendants of the priests and the Levites. To correct and rebuke others who are considered our subordinates is easier, as we feel we have some authority over them; to do the same to our peers and equal is a more daunting task. But Ezra obeyed God word and carried out his duties as a priest. Brothers and sisters, Ezra has set us an example for us to follow. We must not be afraid to confront people of their sins if God has directed us to take actions.

Secondly, God wants the people to confess their sins. Ezra called for an assembly to address all the people, during which he pointed the sins of the people and commanded them to confess their sins immediately (v11a). This call for confession is a consistent theme throughout the Bible, especially in the history of Israel’s and Judah’s kings. God will forgive his people when the confess their sins; God even forgave the Ninevites (in Jonah) when they confessed and turned from their evil ways. In the NT, 1 John 1:9 tells us that “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” God wants to restore us to himself, and knowing that we are powerless to deal with sins ourselves, he gave us his son Jesus to die for us, so that through believing in Jesus, our sins may be forgiven, and we may be restored to a rightful relationship with him.

Thirdly, God wants us to be separated from the source of our sins. Ezra not only led the people to confess their sins, he also called them to action. He called the people to separate themselves from the foreign people around them and from their foreign wives. God does not want them to be connected to their source of sin any longer. It can be likened to a contagious disease like cancer, we must take immediate actions to stem it out or risk being overcome by cancerous cells.

Sow a thought, reap an action. If the though is not right, not edifying, not honouring to God, we must nip the thought in the bud. No sin can materialize and reach full maturity if we deal with it in its infancy stage. Sin, like a baby, takes time to grow. In the case of City Harvest, had more leaders and members spoken up against the corruption of the leaders, had they managed to nip the corruption in its bud, we would not see a full blown case today, where the name of Christ is tarnished and blemished.

In today’s context, as Paul taught the believers in Corinth, we must not be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14-17). Christians must not seek lifetime union with non-Christians in marriage. This is very much like Ezra telling the Israelites not to marry pagan women in the post-exilic days. Ezra asked the people to divorce their pagan wives. However, in NT days, Paul addressed the issue of believers having married non-believers in 1 Cor 7:12-14. He asked them to continue to live with their non-believing spouses and not to divorce them, if the latter are willing to live with the former. So as much as we understand why Ezra preached an immediate separation from pagan wives, we do not follow the same way today. Instead, we follow Paul’s teaching to continue to set an example for our non-believing spouses. Having said all this, it is best not to marry non-believers in the first place.

Brothers and sisters, having heard this morning that God is interested to deal with our sins and to restore us to himself, let us consider what actions we need to take in our lives. Let us be willing to examine our lives in terms of hidden sins that continue to grow and fester in our hearts…it could be simple sins like jealousy, pride, selfishness, addiction to a game or even pornography, or something that the Spirit has prompted you to take note of; let us be willing to confess our sins before God, and be willing to take appropriate actions to root out the sins…such as confessing your sins to a dear brother or sister and asking him or her to keep you accountable for the use of your time and resources so that you do not continue to sin.

On the other hand, God may be asking you to be like Ezra, to be the voice of rebuke and correction to other believers in SBC, in your church or Christian community. Are you willing to speak out for God, to save a dear brother or sister, or a group of believers from disastrous consequences of sin? Are you willing to go into a period of praying and fasting before you confront these sinners that God wants you to speak to? Let us be found faithful in responding to the voice of God.

Let us pray.