

- You might remember that we started a study in the book of Ezra almost a year ago. We've take a few breaks along the way. But we have opened our hearts and minds to Ezra's truth for 15 messages... and today will be number 16.
  - I invite you to open your Bible to the end of Ezra and chapter 9.
  - And I invite you to think with me on the topic: *CONSECRATION: How to Be What You have Become*
  - I will not review. Because review is boring. But I will backfill whatever info to make sense of things as we go.
- I. *When these things were done, the leaders came to me, saying... (Ezra 9:1, NKJV)*
- A. Okay, so now let's review. What things were done? The main thing that happened just before this, is pretty huge. Several thousand of God's people just returned home. You ask, well, where did they go?
  - B. Answer is, they went into exile. What I mean is that their whole nation was destroyed by military conquest. As a result, the people were scattered all across the known world.
  - C. Now, it's a long story... but they are beginning to go home.
  - D. We are in chapter 9. In chapter 8, like I said, several thousands of Jews became pilgrims, and travelled from all over as pilgrims, and finally got themselves home.
    - 1. They returned to the Promised Land... which is where they were meant to be.
    - 2. They regathered with others who had already made the journey before them.
    - 3. They restarted their worship of God around the temple for the first time in a lifetime. All the machinery of priesthood and sacrifices and worshippers and offerings... they turned all of that back on. And it was pretty awesome for them to be part of it.
  - E. Now, chapter 9 starts with "when these things were done..."
  - F. You can diagram their experience this way.
    - 1. *Disobedience > Discipline > Exile > Repentance > Restoration > Return > Sweet Spot*
  - G. That sweet spot was the goal.
    - 1. That sweet spot was the place where... they would experience all the grace God had for them
    - 2. That sweet spot was the place where... they would be, in experience, all that they had become by title and nature.
  - H. And now it's time to enjoy that sweet spot for generations to come.
  - I. And their leader, one of the greatest leaders of the ancient people of God, a man named Ezra, is very happy.
    - 1. For about a minute and a half..
- II. *When these things were done, the leaders came to me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass." (Ezra 9:1, 2, NKJV).*
- A. It doesn't take much background to conclude that whatever was happening here was horribly wrong.
  - B. They were in the right place. They were in the right rooms. They were with the right people. They were singing the right songs. And in terms of religious machinery, they were doing the right things.
  - C. But still there was something horribly wrong... What was it?
  - D. It had to do with marriages, but it was deeper than marriage. When the people of God set out for the Promised Land way back in the days of Moses, a thousand years before this, Moses warned them not to let their sons and daughters marry into the other tribes of the land.
  - E. Why? Because these tribes worshipped idols and, in that worship of idols, they embraced every kind of dehumanizing and perverted forms of behavior you could ever imagine.
    - 1. To join in with idol worship was not only to disrespect God, it was also dehumanize themselves... and their children too.
  - F. So when Ezra is finally at rest in his home, and so thankful and so at peace when everything is going so well, here in the spiritual sweet spot, it comes as a total shock to the system that these earlier waves of returnees have embraced idols by marrying idol worshipping spouses, so that what is called the holy seed is now being polluted. It's a shock to the system.
- III. *So when I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished. Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. (Ezra 9:3, 4, NKJV).*
- A. It's a gut punch. And as weird as these actions he takes are, everybody gets it. Why is he so upset?
  - B. Remember this:
    - 1. *Disobedience > Discipline > Exile > Repentance > Restoration > Return > Sweet Spot*
  - C. They're doing it again. They are doing again the very disobedience that triggered whole horrible chain reaction in the first place!
  - D. It's spiritual ground hog day.
    - 1. I wonder if you might be living your own spiritual ground hog day.
      - a) What is it that trips you up? What sin, what temptation, what mental attitude, what conversations... What are the idols that pollute your holiness over and over and over again?
        - (1) Is it sexual action out of marriage? Again and again? Is it a critical spirit or a sharp tongue?
        - (2) How about on social media? Is it self-righteousness on steroids? Always pointing the finger of blame at others even as you congratulate yourself for being reasonable and righteous?
        - (3) What about just the neglect of God and the neglect of God's Word? What about prayer? And witnessing?

- b) Listen, I can go on and on until we're all a quivering mass of guilt and shame before an exalted and holy God.
- c) But please let me remind us all that when you marry an idol, you trigger a chain reaction that on your rational days you want absolutely no part of.
- 2. On the day God saved you, He envisioned a perfect, awesome, absolutely fantastic sweet spot for your life.
  - a) That sweet spot is the place where... you can experience all the grace God has for you.
  - b) That sweet spot is the place where... you will be, in experience, all that you have become by title and your new nature.
    - (1) And God is bringing you there... but...
    - (2) But you always have to keep starting over because you welcome disobedience into your life.
    - (3) And you've embraced an idol, or two, or ten...
    - (4) And you need to get rid of it decisively, and intentionally, and once for all.
- 3. When you are saved, you have the right to say, God, you are mine.
  - a) *Salvation... God, you are mine.*
  - b) *Consecration... God, I am yours.*
- 4. When you are consecrated, which is the call to action for my sermon today, you have the right to say, not only, God, you are mine. But in consecration you now add, God I am yours.
  - a) If you have grown up in church, you have heard the word consecration, or rededication... same idea.
  - b) But I want to say true consecration is not what you think it is... more on that in a moment.
- E. Here we have this massive shut down, lockdown, whatever you care to call it. It is affecting churches. It is affecting our church. And everybody wants to regather and restart, like the people of God did in this book..
- F. But I'm looking around, and I'm wondering, what good is it?
- G. What good is it if our bodies are in the right place, but our hearts are not?
  - 1. My heart... I'm preaching to myself.
  - 2. Your heart... I'm preaching to you... please don't be thinking of who else needs this sermon right now.
- H. Consecration...
  - 1. God, I'm yours... in such away that it changes the habits of your life.
  - 2. God, I'm yours... in such a way that it changes the routines of your life.
  - 3. I'm yours... in such away that it changes your whole attitude and outlook on life.
- I. Ezra makes this very public display of anguish and grief. It says in ver 4... "Until the evening sacrifice."
- J. What happens at the evening sacrifice?
  - 1. A substitutionary sacrifice points to the ONE solution for all our guilt and shame.
- K. When the spotlight turned to Jesus Christ, by that evening sacrifice, Ezra was ready to pray.
- L. And Scripture here records one of the greatest prayers of the Bible... one that would be awesome to memorize if you keep on living groundhog day and need to break the cycle.
- IV. *At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God. And I said: "O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens. "Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, as it is this day. (Ezra 9:5-7, NKJV).*
- A. The Anatomy of a Consecrating Life
  - 1. Owning your guilt...
    - a) No blame. No pointing fingers. No excuses. All this mess in our lives, we have caused.
    - b) And I get that there are things you didn't cause. So true. I get that, and I ache with you.
    - c) But until we all own and confess the mess we do cause, we'll never be free.
      - (1) *Until I take 100 percent responsibility for the condition of my life today, I will never make it to my God-ordained sweet-spot.*
- V. *"And now for a little while grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage. For we were slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem. (Ezra 9:8, 9, NKJV).*
- A. Owning your Grace...
  - 1. Grace has been shown. A way of escape has been offered.
  - 2. A peg... a place to hold, onto has been provide.
  - 3. God has given enlightenment. God has offered revival.
  - 4. God has never forsake you, even at your worst.
  - 5. God has extended mercy to you in the eyes of others.
  - 6. God has always been ready, standing by to revive, to repair, to rebuild, and to give and give, grace upon grace.
    - a) You have been given promises.
    - b) You have been given powers.
    - c) You have been given privileges.
    - d) You have been given provision.
    - e) You have been given authority.

- f) You have been given an identity.
- g) You have been given riches.
- h) You have been given a portfolio of supernatural divine assets that makes the angels heads spin, and makes the devil want to throw up...
- i) And the whole work of God in your life is about empowering you to be what you have become.
  - (1) And yet... if you think you will find your joy and your life through money, sex, power, chemicals, play, sports or fun...
  - (a) You are living beneath your dignity,
  - (b) And missing out on a mountain of grace that already has your name on it. Don't blame God.
- j) There is not now, and never was, and never will be a shortage of grace in the life of a child of God.
  - (1) Until you own the grace that is yours in Christ, you will never find your sweet spot.
  - (2) Ezra knew this, and he prayed that way.

VI. *And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, which You commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, 'The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their impurity. Now therefore, do not give your daughters as wives for their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons; and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave it as an inheritance to your children forever.' And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us such deliverance as this, should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people committing these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there would be no remnant or survivor? (Ezra 9:10-14, NKJV).*

- A. The first paragraph was owing your guilt. The second paragraph was about owning your grace.
  - B. This third paragraph is about *Owning your guilt in the face of your grace.*
  - C. So many people get into such horrible trouble. And then God delivers you and it's an awesome deliverance. It's an answer to many prayers. Your friends have given. They have sacrificed and helped. Your church has stood by you. God has done miracles for you and he's delivered you from your troubles. Hallelujah.
  - D. But two minutes later, you are triggering the very same self destruct sequence again that dug your hole in the first place.
    - 1. The grace is staring you in the face. And you are turning your back on it.
  - E. God wants you to be strong. God wants you to eat the fruit of the land. God wants you to leave an inheritance of grace to your children forever. God is dealing with you much less than your iniquities deserve. God is ready to give an amazing deliverance. And yet, we again and again and again break his commandments. And we embrace an idol, or a lie, or an addiction, or a bad attitude, or a judgment spirit, or self-pity, or a pet sin, or greed, or abuse, or plain old laziness.
    - 1. It is sick. It is evil. It is time to change the rules of your game.
      - a) It is time for consecration.
      - b) It is time for a rededication to the Lord.
      - c) It is time to put miles of distance between you and your idols.
      - d) It is time for grace-driven holiness and the wholeness it brings.
      - e) It is time for you and me to actually be what we have already become by being saved.
  - F. The book of Ezra leads to the book of Nehemiah...
  - G. In Nehemiah, they finish building their city and their walls. In Nehemiah, they enter their sweet spot.
  - H. But you can't get to Nehemiah without finishing this book of Ezra.
    - 1. *You've got to let go of your idols to experience the awesome grace that is already yours in Christ.*
  - I. You can't hold onto both.
- VII. *"O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day. Here we are before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before You because of this!" (Ezra 9:15, NKJV).*
- A. If you listened to my message last weekend, you know how God worked in my heart to radically revise our plan for Pathway.
  - B. Instead of focusing on our buildings and all of that — and believe me, we are all eager to get back in — but that's not the main thing. I'm inviting you to a High Intensity Summer at Pathway, no matter what happens with our buildings.
  - C. And it begins right here, in our hearts, the real worship center of Redding, California.
    - 1. You want a worship service?
      - a) *Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. (Romans 12:1, NAS95).*
  - D. Instead of being upset about what we don't have, why not lean into what we do have.
    - 1. Let's be the remnant. Let's be the nucleus of revival. Let's lay a foundation of consecration.
      - a) So when we come back together, it's an off the charts celebration.
        - (1) A consecrated Christian is a mighty weapon in the hands of God.
  - E. I am going to invite you to say a prayer of consecration, a prayer of rededication to the Lord.
    - 1. This is radically different from a prayer of salvation.
    - 2. What I am talking about today is for those who have already been saved. For those who already have Jesus as your Savior.

3. If you have not been saved. You can be saved by telling God that you are believing in Jesus Christ crucified and risen again, as your only hope of salvation.
- F. But my message today is for those who are already saved.
- G. I said earlier that consecration is probably not what you think it is.
- H. It is not what you've been told by religion, over and over and over again to do till you are exhausted, striving in your flesh to please God.
- I. True consecration is not a dedication on your part to do things for Christ.
  1. *Consecration is dedication on your part to allow and welcome Christ, doing in you what he committed to do the day he saved you.*
    - a) *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. (Philippians 3:12, NKJV).*
  2. *Consecration is you allowing God to empower you to be what you have become.*

## VIII. Conclusion

- A. Who were these people who committed this sin?
  1. They were priests. They were royalty. They were God's people.
- B. Christian, you have become a PRIEST... direct access to God any time, anywhere, with an anointing and a power to serve.
  1. God will empower you to be what you have become, if only you will consecrate your life to him.
- C. Christian, you have become ROYALTY... a royal member of the household of faith with riches and authority to change the world.
  1. God will empower you to be what you have become, if only you will consecrate your life to him.
- D. Christian, you have become the PEOPLE OF GOD... precious, unique, special, regenerate, a new creation, and a new spiritual species.
  1. God will empower you to be what you have become, if only you will consecrate your life to him.
  2. This is the sweet spot that is waiting for you as you consecrate your life to the God who has dedicated everything to you.

## IX. Prayer

- A. *Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee.*
- B. *I let go of my idols.*
  1. *I let go of my sins.*
  2. *I let go of my addictions into habits and routines.*
  3. *I let go of my laziness, my complacency, my apathy, and my despair.*
    - a) *Lord the pornography that makes my heart grow cold.*
    - b) *The greed that makes me feel so superior.*
    - c) *The victimhood that makes me feel sorry for myself.*
    - d) *The half heartedness and the lukewarmness.*
    - e) *The critical spirit. The sharp tongue. The self righteousness.*
    - f) *The lack of prayer. My neglect of your Word.*
  - (1) *Oh God, I have no hope but You.*
  4. *But in you, I do have hope.*
  5. *God I asked you to make me what I have already become. I welcome your work. I welcome your Spirit.*
  6. *I take hold of that peg today and say, Today is a change of direction by your grace. I have no confidence in myself but all confidence in Christ in me.*
  7. *So live through me, Jesus.*
    - a) *Through Salvation, I can say, God you are mind.*
    - b) *Today, through consecration, I do say, God I am yours.*
  8. *I consecrate my life to you as best as I can, knowing that you have dedicated your life to me to the point even of death.*
  9. *In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

- We're going to continue this next week, and I pray God begins an amazing work in your life this week.
- Keep an eye open for one thing: how is God elevating your life this week? Instead of limping beneath your dignity, how is he empowering you to be the awesome person you have already become in his sight?
- Also, next week, I'm going to invite you to take a radical, and pretty cool, step to declare your newfound consecration to Christ.
- Not out of pride, but out of humility.