

## **EZRA 9:5-15 -- EZRA'S PRAYER – LORD WE HAVE SINNED!**

4/25/15 Sat Morn Prayer

### **Biblical Background:**

- The seventy years of the Babylonian captivity of Judah has ended. About 60 years previously, around 538 B.C., the first group had left Babylon to go back to Jerusalem, under the order of King Cyrus, who gave the command for them to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. Cyrus was prophesied by Isaiah at least 100 years before Cyrus was born; before the Babylonian captivity and about 170 years before Cyrus issued the command to restore and rebuild the temple.
- They got a start in building the altar and laying the foundation. Then due to interference from their enemies and becoming somewhat disenchanted with the task, did no further building for a 16 years period. During this time they worked on their own personal houses.
- Around 520 B.C., Haggai came from Babylon with a message from the Lord to get back to work in rebuilding the temple. They did! It was finished in about four years.
- About 60 later, about 458 B.C., Ezra goes from Babylon to Jerusalem. Upon his return he found to his horror, that the Jews, the people from Israel, the Levites and the priests, were intermarrying the pagans. Ezra was most upset. We are told in Ezra 9:3--*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.*

### **Ezra then proceeded to pray this prayer:**

***Ezr 9:5 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.***

- Ezra knew there was a time to mourn and he did that for a long time. He also knew that there was a time to pray, and now he would begin his prayer.
- As Ezra prayed, he alone prayed - yet because he stood before an assembly of the people of God, there was a sense in which he led them in prayer.
- ***Fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God:*** Ezra was one of many in the Bible who prayed on his **knees**.
- Kneeling is a sign of humble respect. Raising one's hands is a sign of openness to God and recognizing that all gifts are from the LORD'S hand.

***Ezr 9:6 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.***

- Though Ezra's hands were raised his face was down in shame and humiliation before the LORD. We sense that the sins of the people of Israel had weighed his head down so much that he could not lift his head.
- ***Ashamed and humiliated:*** The first speaks of being ***ashamed***; the second of "the pain that accompanies shame."
- "God had been so often provoked, and had so often pardoned them and they had continued to transgress, that he was ashamed to go back again to the throne of grace to ask for mercy in their behalf. This is the genuine feeling of every reawakened *backslider*." Do we not sense this as well?
- ***Our iniquities have risen higher than our heads:*** Significantly, Ezra prayed saying "***our iniquities***" instead of "*their iniquities*." Ezra had just arrived to this community and he had not shared any kind of life or conduct with them. Yet he knew that because they were bound by covenant together before God, *their iniquities were in fact his*.

***Ezr 9:7 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 recognized the generally sinful past of the tribes of Israel, and how their exile was a righteous work of God against His sinful people.

***Ezr 9:8 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.***

- ***And now for a little while grace has been shown:*** Ezra then reflected on the remarkable goodness of God in bringing a **remnant** of His people back from exile and allowing them to live in the Promised Land again.

- **To give us a peg in His holy place:** The idea is that Israel once again had a safe position, a standing in God's favor and in His temple. In those days, houses didn't really have cupboards or storage closets as we think of them. Things were stored on *pegs* set up all around the room.
- Only a few days before this, Ezra had seen the temple for the first time in his life. He was impressed that God had given His people **a peg in His holy place** once again, and was therefore afraid that their casual disregard for this blessing would once again stir up the righteous anger of God.
- **And give us a measure of revival in our bondage:** Ezra rejoiced to see even a *measure of revival*, and knew that this was an emblem of God's mercy and favor that should not be despised with disobedience and compromise.

**Ezr 9:9** *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.*

- **To revive us, to repair the house ...** Ezra was impressed by all these signs of God's mercy and favor to His people, signs he had only seen a few days before for the first time. It made him appreciate how good God had been to His people, and how dangerous it was for them to sin and compromise in response to His goodness.
- **To give us a wall:** "They had the fence of the king of Persia's favor. They had also God's providence, as a hedge or wall of fire round about them." 'A little grace had been granted by God to his people; a small remnant had found its weary way back to its home and driven a single peg into its soil; a solitary ray of light was shining; a faint breath of freedom lightened their slavery. How graphically Ezra epitomizes Jewish experience in these few words!'"

**Ezr 9:10** *And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, Ezr 9:11 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.*

- **What shall we say after this?** Ezra offers no excuses and not even an explanation. Their conduct was indefensible and a direct disobedience to what God **command by His servants the prophets**.

**Ezr 9:12** *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.'*

- **That you may be strong:** "Although you may fancy that this way of making leagues and marriages with them is the only way to establish and settle you, yet I assure you it will weaken and ruin you and the contrary course will make you stronger."

**Ezr 9:13** *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,*

**Ezr 9:14** *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?*

- As severe as the exile was, Ezra recognized that it was **less than** what the people of God deserved. As he looked at their present disobedience, he understood that it was a way of despising the great mercy God had shown in the past and made them deserving of a complete and final judgment.
- As the tribes of Israel piled sin upon sin before the fall of the northern and southern kingdoms, God still showed remarkable mercy to them. He did not *have to* preserve them at in exile; there could have been genocide instead. Additionally, He did not *have to* bring them back from exile into the Promised Land once again. Each of these was a wonderful example of God's mercy in the midst of judgment.

**Ezr 9:15** *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!'"*

- Here Ezra wisely appealed to the LORD as the **God of Israel**. Though they had been unfaithful to Him, Ezra still hoped for covenant mercies from the LORD because He was their God.
- **You are righteous:** Ezra also wisely appealed to God's righteousness, especially in leaving a **remnant** in fulfillment of His prior promises ([2 Chronicles 30:6](#); [Isaiah 10:20-22](#)).
- **Here we are before You in our guilt:** Ezra wisely did not claim an excuse or a reason for their sin. Israel had sinned and they were *guilty*. The appeal must be made for mercy to the guilty, not as a favor to the deserving (or semi-deserving).

- We note here that Ezra did not make excuses or claim special circumstances. He simply realized that **no one can stand before You because of this!**
- Ezra ended his prayer not by asking for forgiveness, but by declaring that God was righteous.

### **SUMMARY:**

- Ezra's actions and response are excellent examples for us to follow.
- Upon hearing and seeing the gross sin of the people, their leaders and their priests, he was quick to humble himself for "our" guilt, and repent! - *"I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished"*
- He was so overwhelmed by the sin of his people that he tore his clothes and tore out his hair. Instead of beginning a tirade against them, which would have been characteristic of many, notice the next step Ezra took – He prayed!
- Notice he includes himself in the iniquity and the guilt.
- He didn't make excuses! The appeal must be made for mercy to the guilty, not as a favor to the deserving (or semi-deserving).
- Ezra ended his prayer not by asking for forgiveness, but by declaring that God was righteous.
- ***Deu 32:4 He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He.***

### **TAKE IT TO THE LORD IN PRAYER! (What a Friend We have in Jesus!)**

1. *What a friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!  
Oh, what peace we often forfeit, Oh, what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer!*
2. *Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged—Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a friend so faithful, Who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness; Take it to the Lord in prayer.*
3. *Are we weak and heavy-laden, cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Savior, still our refuge—Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer!  
In His arms He'll take and shield thee, Thou wilt find a solace there.*

Composer **Joseph M. Scriven** Writes *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*

Irish born Joseph M. Scriven (1819-1896) was 25 years old, in love and to be married. The **day before his wedding his fiancée died** in a tragic drowning accident. Heartbroken, Joseph sailed from his homeland to start a new life in Canada. While in Canada working as a teacher, he fell in love again and became engaged to Eliza Roche, a relative of one of his students. **Once again, Joseph's hopes and dreams were shattered when Eliza became ill and died before the wedding could take place.**

Although one can only imagine the turmoil within this young man, history tells us that his faith in God sustained him. Soon after Eliza's death Joseph joined the Plymouth Brethren and began preaching for a Baptist church. He never married, but spent the remainder of his life giving all his time, money and even the clothes off his own back to help the less fortunate and to spread the love and compassion of Jesus wherever he went.

**Around the same time that Eliza died, Joseph received word from Ireland that his mother was ill. He could not go to be with her, so he wrote a letter of comfort and enclosed one of his poems entitled *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*.**

Many years later a friend was sitting with Joseph, as he was very ill. During this visit, the friend was very impressed when he ran across his poems, including *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*. As a result of this visit, almost 30 years after his letter of comfort to his mother, Joseph's poems were published in a book called *Hymns and Other Verses*. Soon thereafter, noted musician Charles C. Converse (1834-1918) put music to one of those poems: *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*.

Well-known musician and revivalist Ira D. Sankey (1840-1908) was a great admirer of Joseph Scriven. In 1875, Sankey came upon the music and words for *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*. He included it as the last entry into his well-known publication *Sankey's Gospel Hymns Number 1*.

After Joseph Scriven's death, the citizens of Port Hope, Ontario, Canada, where he gave so much of himself, erected a monument to his life. The seemingly sad and obscure life of one man resulted in so many lives being uplifted, both in his own time, and for many years after whenever the beautiful and comforting words of *What a Friend We Have in Jesus* are sung.