

focused on verses 6 through 15. So Ezra 9, I'll read the whole chapter, but the sermon will be on verses 6 through 15. Now if you were here the last Sunday evening when I was preaching on Ezra 9, I made the comment that I ended up only preaching the first five verses because there was so much in there. And I don't make it a custom to encourage per se that you go and listen to that sermon, but I do think it would be helpful because I'm not going to comment much tonight on the first five verses. That's because I preached an entire sermon on the first five verses a couple of weeks ago. But it would perhaps bring some helpful aid as we dive into verses 6 through 15.

But as you come to Ezra chapter 9, you must remember where we've just been. Ezra chapter 8 ends on this very positive note. And I made the comment last time that when you come to Ezra 9, you might expect it to begin this way. After these things, they lived happily ever after the end. Because Ezra 8 ends so well. They've made it back to Jerusalem. They've had a great worship service.

But instead, Ezra 9 begins with a great confession of sin. It's a heavier chapter. And while you might think it should have begun otherwise, what you really see happening is the sin of God's people being exposed in the presence of godly leadership and worship, and they need to confess their sins. In the first five verses, one of the things that you see is Ezra's response to the sin of the people.

He is informed in those first five verses that the people of God in Jerusalem have been marrying foreign women. And the problem with this is that these foreign women worshipped false gods. They were setting themselves up for complete and utter apostasy. This is a massive issue. It's a grievous sin in the sight of God.

And Ezra's response you might find a little bit shocking. He tears his garment, he rips out some of his own beard, he rips out some of his own hair, and we read in chapter 10 verse 1 that he weeps. And we might be inclined to think, Ezra, what's gotten into you? And Ezra would say, I'm just taking sin seriously.

And I suggested in that sermon, where has weeping for sin gone in the church today. And the reason that there is seldom weeping over sin in the church today is not because we don't sin seriously anymore. It's because we don't take sin seriously on the whole anymore. And so while I don't believe that weeping is to be the sort of perpetual disposition of the Christian.

Again, I would encourage you to listen to that sermon. I tried to pastorally elaborate on this a bit more in that sermon, but I do believe the general disposition of the Christian because our Christ has died for our sins, our Christ is risen, our Christ is at the right hand of God the Father and ever lives to make intercession for us. Because of these realities, the general disposition of the Christian ought to be one of joy, but you will be hard-pressed to find a saint in the Bible who's elaborated on in length throughout their life who you don't see at some occasion weeping over sin or in a very real clear way taking sin far more seriously than on the whole you see the church taking sin today.

With this introduction, let us pray and ask God to help us as we read the holy word of God. Our God, we come before you and we pray that you would help us to have hearts that are sensitive to the truth as it is revealed in this portion of your word. We ask for your help, pour out your spirit in Christ's name, amen. Ezra chapter nine, beginning in verse one.

After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, the people of Israel and the priests and the Levites had 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.

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. As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled. 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. 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, saying, oh my God, I am ashamed and blushed to lift my eyes, my face to you.

My God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. 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 this day.

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 the holy place. That our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our slavery. 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.

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 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. 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. 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, 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? 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.

While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him out of Israel, for the people wept bitterly. Amen and amen. Thus ends the reading of God's word. May he bless the proclamation of it to our lives. Well, today in our text, you see the seriousness of sin. You see the seriousness of sin. We're going to look at this under three headings. General acknowledgement. Particular aggravations. And who can stand. General acknowledgement, particular aggravations, and who can stand first. General acknowledgement in verse six. Look there again.

Oh my God, I am ashamed and blushed 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. There's a general acknowledgement in verse six of their sins. He acknowledges particularly their shame and their guilt. Ezra displays in this verse what we might call holy shame.

Holy shame. And what is holy shame? Holy shame is a sense of your unworthiness before God because of your sins. It's a sense of your unworthiness before God because of your sins. It's an embarrassing feeling. A feeling of unworthiness before God because of your sins.

He says, Oh my God, I am ashamed and blushed to lift my eyes to you. It was as he considered the God of the Bible. in contrast to their sins, that he felt this holy shame. It was as he began to lift his eyes to God that he sensed the utter unworthiness of himself and the people in the presence of God.

It's much like Isaiah 6. And it was because of their iniquities or their sins. He says it clearly, for our iniquity. Do you remember the tax collector in Luke 18? Do you remember how he beat his breast and he would not even lift up his eyes to heaven? And he says, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. There was a sense of holy shame in the tax collector. And holy shame is a good thing. Praise God if you feel ashamed of your sins. Jeremiah. Chapter 6 says this. Jeremiah 6, verse 15.

Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed. They did not know how to blush. Therefore, they shall fall among those who fall. At the time that I punish them, They shall be overthrown, says the Lord. They did not even know how to blush. Chapter 8, verse 12 of Jeremiah. Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed. They did not know how to blush.

It has become customary in some Christian circles to make sin a laughing matter. In some Christian circles, men joke about the sins of their youth. They will laugh about the very things about which they ought to be ashamed. Contrast that with Ezra 9 6.

He was ashamed and he blushed when he considered his sin and the sins of the people in the sight God. He's taking sin seriously. Now to be clear, holy shame is not being self-righteous and condescending towards other people. Holy shame is a sense of your own sinfulness and your own unworthiness before God.

Ezra did not have a holier-than-thou attitude. That's very evident in the text. Already in the very first verse of confession, he shifts from the first person singular, I, I am ashamed, to the first person plural, our and we, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens.

He did not have a holier-than-thou attitude. He acknowledged that the sins of these people were in one way or another associated with him. Now, Ezra did not commit these sins, at least in their outward manifestation in this text. He did not take any foreign women to be his wife.

So why does he say our iniquities? Why does he say our sins? Why does he speak in this way as if he's a contributor? And you'll get different answers. A lot of the commentators will say that it's because he, as a Christ figure, as a representative of the people, is speaking in such a manner like Isaiah 53 verse 12, our iniquities. You know how Christ was numbered among the transgressors, even though he wasn't himself a transgressor.

And I think that's legitimate. I don't think that's totally a far field. But I also think it's because Ezra knew in his heart that this is exactly who he is in himself. If God would restrain his grace for a moment from Ezra's life, he would have taken as many foreign women as anyone else. I think he knew that this was who he is in himself. And that's why he could say, this is our sins. This is who I am. I need you, God, to have mercy. on me and on us, the people.

So the man with holy shame does not have a holier-than-thou attitude where they look down on other people, but this is how they act. They take their sin seriously. They care about their sin. They don't treat it as a joke. They treat it with weightiness because it is weighty.

But what should a man do with holy shame? If you're here tonight and you have holy shame, and I hope that you do at some level, not that you're perpetually kind of living in some sort of beaten down, miserable disposition, but that there's a sense when you know you transgress the law of God and you know it. I hope that you have some sense of holy shame. That's a good thing.

But what do you do with that? What does Ezra do with it? He takes it to the Lord in prayer. He confesses his sin to God. Holy shame, beloved, should not keep you from going to your heavenly father. Please hear that. That's what Satan wants you to do with that holy shame, right? To keep it to yourself, to not deal with it. But what Ezra does is he goes to his father in prayer, fleeing to him for mercy. And so too I do hope is your life experience.

But then there's this guilt, guilt here in this general acknowledgement. He mentions guilt in verse six and actually three more times in this chapter. But guilt, beloved, is the fact of having broken God's law. It's a fact of having broken God's law.

Sometimes you feel guilty. And that's true. But sometimes you don't. But guilt is not determined by feeling. It's determined by fact. So, for example, a man murders somebody. The judge says, you're guilty. And he says, excuse me, judge, I don't feel particularly guilty. That's irrelevant, the judge might say, because you're guilty, right? It's a fact. And so Ezra is not only feeling guilty, which is true, but the feeling is grounded in reality here.

He's acknowledging that he feels this way, but it's because he knows he's broken God's law and the people have broken God's law. They transgressed the commandments of God. He says, our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. He calls his guilt and the guilt of the people great in verse seven and great in verse 13.

So the question must arise, who can deal with shame that runs this deep? Who can deal with transgressions that rise higher than your head and guilt that rises higher than the heavens? And the answer to that question is only the

Lord Jesus Christ. He alone has steadfast love that can rise higher than the heavens. He alone has blood that can run deeper than your deepest shame. He alone, beloved, is the one in whom you can have this redemption when you see the gravity of your sin.

And that, in some ways, is where Ezra appears to be turning, in a way. Because notice, as he's confessing these sins, he begins with, my God, And he says again in verse 6, my God. He is owning God as his personal God even in the midst of his shame and his guilt. And that's what you and I must do. You confess your sin. in the certainty that this is not just a God, not just the God, but he is my God. Jesus Christ is my Lord and my Savior. And so you confess that guilt, you confess that sin and the confidence that he is my God.

This is where there's hope. Ezra's torn garment and Ezra's Tear-covered face and Ezra's shattered heart could not atone for his sins. But my God could atone for Ezra's sins. Could my zeal no respite know? Could my tears forever flow? All for sin could not atone. Thou must save and thou alone.

It is God, your father, who chose you from before the foundation of the world. It is God, the son, your elder brother, who came and took on flesh and shed his blood for your sins and rose for your justification. It is God, the Holy Spirit, who has been poured out on you richly through Jesus Christ and has granted you the gift of regeneration and saving faith and repentance. This is your God. He is the one to whom you run and he is the one who saves your soul.

So you see this general acknowledgement in verse 6. And I want to ask you this then tonight. This week, when you sense holy shame and when you know holy guilt that you have broken God's commandments this week, what are you going to do with that? Ezra 9 verse 6 is an example. Go to your heavenly father and confess your sins. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

You know, some parent might say to their child or children, clean your room. And the room's a mess and somehow in three minutes, the child comes back out and they say, mom, dad, my room's clean. And the parent thinks, that's incredible. So the parent goes in there and they look and think, well, lo and behold, they cleaned the whole room. And they open up the closet, they think, Oh, riddle solved.

You threw everything into the closet. Dear ones, we can do that with our sin. We can say, I'm going to ignore it. I'm going to just try to forget about it. I'm going to just try to put it over here and go about my day. But that's not dealing with it.

Ezra 9 6 is how you deal with your sin. You've got to confess it to your Heavenly Father. And I assure you, in Christ, there is joy and peace, but repentance is hard. Repentance is hard. There's a reason the Puritans said it is the vomit of the soul. It's hard in the moment, but it feels good later. This week, don't put your sin and your guilt in the closet.

Secondly, particular aggravations. Some sins, and you see this in basically verses 7 through 14, some sins, because of their several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others. And you see that in our

text. You see three things that make these particular sins particularly heinous in the sight of God. Let's just cover that for a moment. One of the things that makes their sin so heinous, one of the particular aggravations, is ignoring consequences for sin. Look at verse seven, 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 this day. You see what he's saying here is we've been ignoring the consequences for our sins.

We got here. in this whole Babylonian exile situation because we were doing these sorts of things. We were marrying foreign women. We were not acknowledging or caring about the laws of God. And now, after you've graciously brought us back, we're doing the same thing again. We're ignoring your loving rod of discipline that you placed upon our backs when you sent us to Babylon. Now we're back and we're ignoring the consequences. keep on doing it.

It's like the drunkard who loses his job because he doesn't show up to work because he's drunk and then after losing his job, he continues to drink. He's not learning from God's loving consequences for his sin to help that man turn from those sins and turn to him for help. So when you don't learn from your sins, the consequences, rather, of them. That is aggravating sin, making it more heinous in God's sight. Another aggravation is the spurning of mercy. They spurn his mercy, verses 8 through 10.

But now, so there's this sense of relief, 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. 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.

And now, O our God, what shall we say after this, after you've shown us these mercies? For we have forsaken your commandments." And then again, he picks up this theme of spurning mercy in verses 13 and 14, 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. Shall we break your commandments again and intermarry with the peoples who practice these abominations?"

So the sense that you see here is he is contrasting how merciful God has been with them and how they're allowing God's mercy to be an excuse to continue in their sins. Like the child whose parents show him mercy, and then after receiving mercy from mom and dad, they use that mercy as an excuse to do that same iniquity again. And then a third aggravation is found.

So the ignoring of consequences, the spurning of mercy, and then lastly, breaking express express commandments, very clearly given commandments, verses 11 and 12 speak of this. 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. 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.

So it's an express command from God and they knew it. They knew this was God's command to not intermarry with these foreign women and yet they're doing it anyways. And so that aggravates sin it makes it more heinous. This wasn't one of those things where you could understand maybe there was a lack of clarity on the commandment maybe they weren't sure. No they knew exactly what they were doing when they did these things. And so as a Christian, then, the application is this here tonight. Ask yourself these sorts of questions.

Are there areas in my own life where I have experienced consequences directly related to my sin, but instead of learning from those consequences, I'm ignoring those consequences. I'm just continuing in that sin. The example could be lying. So I lie. I get found out. It blows up. It's ruinous to my life, to my day, whatever it might be. But then I just keep on lying.

That's ignoring God's good consequences for our sins to help us learn to confess them. In my life, you ask yourself, has God shown me special mercy? And I've spurned that mercy. For example, maybe you've done something and it's a sinful thing, it's a transgression of God's law, and your friend, your family members against whom you've committed this sin shows you mercy. And rather than taking that as a kind blessing from the Lord, To praise him and to continue to fight against that thing, you just say, well, they didn't bring down the hammer last time. I'll just keep right on ahead sinning.

That's burning God's mercy. And then, has God given any express commands that you know of in his word? And you know his word well enough, perhaps, to know these things. And you know he's given you some commands in his word, and you just simply don't care. That's aggravation of God. It's an aggravation of your sin. It's making it extra heinous in the sight of God.

Well, thirdly, who can stand? And this is our last point, just verse 15 here. Who can stand? And if you can imagine, that's a very understandable question after what we've just seen. 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."

As you come to this final verse, Ezra seems to just pour his heart out and say, you're just God, we're guilty, who can stand? And if you look at the commentators on this verse, the basic answer, the basic thing that you'll find them saying is something like this. Well, Ezra finishes here and he's pretty much hopeless. And I don't agree with that and I'll try to present why I don't believe that's the disposition here at the end. In some ways, Ezra is simply casting himself entirely at the mercy of God.

He's making no effort to say, well, God, you know, I think we deserve something from you. We're not really all that bad. He is just simply humbled. He and the people with him. A simple, humble, woe is me, is where I think you find him. Not without hope, but an honest acknowledgement that The only way they're gonna escape the punishment they deserve is that my God, verse six, will still be my God, will still tend to them, will still care to them. He is saying we have nothing, we literally have nothing to offer you, oh God, in ourselves.

How can God be just, like Ezra says, and ever forgive Ezra's sins and the sins of the people. And there's only one way, and that's at the cross. It is at the cross of Christ that God shows himself to be both just, dealing with sin, and the justifier. Because God dealt with Ezra's sin at the cross. Those who stand, stand only in Christ crucified and raised.

It was at the cross that God declared, Ezra, your sins are forgiven. It was at the resurrection that God declared, Ezra, you're clothed in the righteousness of my dear son. To that question, who can stand? We got the answer in Psalm 130 tonight. which we sang, if you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness that you may be feared.

The only ones who stand in the presence of God are those who stand in the blood and righteousness of Christ. There is no safe place to stand. apart from Christ. And that's why Ezra, I believe, ends with this sense of just utter self hopelessness. He doesn't try to claim anything in the final verse of his confession. because he is simply going to rest in the my God of verse six. He's going to trust that there is a way and it will be found in nothing he or the other people can do but only in the God who could find a way to justify sinners and declare them righteous in his sight without setting aside his justice which only happens at the cross of Christ.

So this week When you go to confess your sins, that's where you're going to need to stand. You're not going to stand in yourself. You're going to stand in Christ, and you're going to say, in your own words, Father, I have done X. I have transgressed this. I literally have nothing. I am actually, in myself, I am completely guilty, declared condemned.

But in Christ, Father, my God, There is mercy. There is forgiveness of sins in Jesus. And so that is where you should stand this week. And I believe that Ezra doesn't end hopelessly. He ends without a thought of any man-made way to be justified. But he's still remembering, my God, he can do it. So we've seen the seriousness of sin today and the general acknowledgement, the particular aggravations and who can stand.

Let us pray. Our Heavenly Father, we do come before you tonight and we do pray that you would help all of us here to take our sins more seriously. Perhaps we might be tempted to take our neighbor's sins seriously because they've offended us. And so we want to be aggravated with them or frustrated with them. But oh God, help all of us to know to take our own sins seriously and grant us the grace that we've seen in our text, to go before a God who will do something, who has done something in Jesus. Oh Lord God, I pray that we would say with Ezra, my God, the God who can deal with my sins, and as Ezra didn't quite know in the profound ways which we do, has dealt with our sins, in Christ crucified, Christ risen.

And so, oh God, we can come before you this week in confidence. Oh yes, God, shamed, shamed because we've broken your commandments, but confidence that with you indeed there is forgiveness, forgiveness of sins, bountifully beyond all of our most incredible imaginations. Such is the way my God deals with us in Christ. Do you be the glory of God? We ask for your help in Jesus's name. Amen.