

We come tonight to the final chapter of the book of Ezra. And after this, we'll continue on through the book of Nehemiah. As you turn to Ezra chapter 10, let us remember what we've most recently seen in the ninth chapter. In the ninth chapter, Ezra gets that news that many in Judah had been marrying unbelievers, those who were foreign women. And this is a serious sin. It was a serious sin, not because they were foreign, but because they worshipped other gods. They were idolaters. They worshipped other gods. They were pagans.

And when Ezra gets this information, you'll remember in chapter nine, he is appalled. He sits on the ground. He pulls out hair from his beard. He pulls out hair from his head and he weeps, and then in verses 4 and 5 of Ezra 9, it mentions that evening sacrifice. That evening sacrifice is so important to understand chapter 9 of Ezra. And the reason it's so important is because it was while he was appalled, sitting on the ground, had pulled out this hair from his beard, this hair from his head, that the evening sacrifice is offered.

After that is offered, you see him beginning in verse 6 of Ezra 9 to confess his sins and the sins of the people. What must it have been about that sacrifice that stirred him up to be willing to confess his sins? And it must, beloved, it must have been that when he saw that sacrifice, he was freshly reminded that there was a bloody sacrifice for great sinners like him and the people. That's what gave him the confidence that he could go and actually confess openly and confess honestly his sins and the sins of the people against God himself. And so throughout Ezra 9, there's this profound, scathing, honest confession.

But at the end of Ezra 9 there is not a clear resolution yet for their sin. They haven't clearly moved to the next steps of what are we going to do now. We've confessed our sin but what is our next step going to be. That brings us to Ezra chapter 10.

With this in mind let us pray and ask God to help us in the reading and preaching of his word. Oh God we do remember that this is your word. We do remember that if your spirit does not help If he does not open eyes and hearts, we will not be able to rightly understand the reading and preaching of your word in the heart. And so we pray for conviction and power by your spirit in the name of Jesus. Amen.

This is the word of God, Ezra chapter 10. 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. And Shechaniah, the son of Jehiel, of the sons of Elam, addressed Ezra, We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land. But even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. Therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children according to the counsel of my Lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to the law. Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you. Be strong and do it.' Then Ezra rose and made the leading priests and Levites and all Israel take oath that they would do as had been said. So they took the oath.

Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God, and went to the chamber of Jehonim, the son of Eliashib, where he spent the night, neither eating bread nor drinking water, for he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles. And a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem, and that if anyone did not come within three days by order of the officials and the elders, all his property should be forfeited, and he himself banned from the congregation of the exiles. Then all the men of

Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within the three days. It was the ninth month, on the 20th day of the month, and all the people sat in the open square before the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of the heavy rain.

And Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, you have broken faith and married foreign women. and so increase the guilt of Israel. Now then, make confession to the Lord, the God of your fathers, and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.'

Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, It is so. We must do as you have said. But the people are many, and it is a time of heavy rain. We cannot stand in the open, nor is this a task for one or for two, for we have greatly transgressed in this matter. Let our officials stand for the whole assembly.

Let all in our cities who have taken foreign wives come at appointed times. and with them the elders and judges of every city until the fierce wrath of our God over this matter is turned away from us. Only Jonathan, the son of Asahel, and Jehoziah, the son of Tikva, opposed this, and Meshulam and Shabathiah, the Levites, supported them. Then the returned exiles did so. Ezra the priest selected men, heads of fathers' houses according to their fathers' houses, each of them designated by name. On the first day of the tenth month, they sat down to examine the matter. And by the first day of the first month, they had come to the end of all the men who had married foreign women.

Now there were found some of the sons of the priests who had married foreign women, Masaiah, Eliezer, Jerob, and Gedaliah, some of the sons of Jeshua, the son of Josedach, and his brothers. They pledged themselves to put away their wives, and their guilt offering was a ram of the flock for their guilt.

Of the sons of Emer, Hananani, and Zebediah, of the sons of Haram, Masiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah, of the sons of Pasher, Elionai, Massiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Josabad, and Ellassah, of the Levites, Josabad, Shimei, Keliah, that is, Kelita, Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer, of the singers, Eliashib, of the gatekeepers, Shelom, Telem, and Uri, and of Israel, of the sons of Parash, Ramiah, Isaiah, Malkijah, Majamin, Eliezer, Hashabiah, and Benaiah, of the sons of Elam, Mataniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abadie, Jeremoth, and Elijah. Of the sons of Zatu, Eliyanai, Eliashib, Metaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Azazah. Of the sons of Bibi, were Jehonun, Hananiah, Zabai, and Athali. Of the sons of Bani, were Meshulam, Malak, Adiah, Jashub, Shil, and Jerimoth, of the sons of Pahath-Moab, Adna, Chilal, Benaiah, Massiah, Mataniah, Bezalel, Benue, and Massahiah, of the sons of Haram, Eliezer, Eshiah, Malachiah, Shemiah, Shimeon, Benjamin, Malach, and Shemariah, of the sons of Hashem, Matiniah, Matatatha, Zabad, Elithelet, Jeremiah, Messiah, and Shimei, of the sons of Bani, Madai, Amram, Uriel, Benaiah, Bediah, Chaluhi, Vanai, Merimoth, Eliashib, Matanai, Jasu, of the sons of Benuei, Shemi, Shalemiah, Nathan, Adiah, Machanadabai, Shashai, Shari, Azariel, Shalemiah, Sharmariah, Shalom, Amariah, and Joseph. Of the sons of Nebo, Jeiel, Matanthiah, Zebad, Zebaniah, Jediah, Joel, and Benaiah. All these had married foreign women, and some of the women had even born children."

Well, this ends the reading of God's Word. May He bless the reading and now the proclamation of it to our lives. When I have a check engine light come on in my car, I have a standard approach. I try to ignore it until it goes away.

I always think that somehow my car will fix itself, and I have a friend who is a mechanic, and he always informs me that that is not the way cars work. Well, friends, when it comes to our sin, the approach can often be, it'll fix itself. I will ignore it, and it will go away. When I get older, I'll deal with it. When circumstances change, that sin will be dealt with in my life. But the truth is, if you do not put away the sin in your life, it's not going to go anywhere. It must be addressed. You cannot approach your sin in such a way that you think, if I just ignore it, it's going to fix itself. It's going to go away.

What we see in Ezra chapter 10 is a call to put away your sin. And you see them putting away their sin really by three things. First, by calling out your sin. Second, by receiving church discipline. And third, by cherishing Christ. Calling out your sin receiving church discipline, and by cherishing Christ. So first, calling out your sin. Put away your sin by calling out your sin, verses 1 through 5.

You see something in verse 1 that is really neat to see, which is this. Confession of sin is contagious. And we saw this in chapter 9 verse 4 as well. Both in chapter 9 verse 4 and here in chapter 10 verse 1, you see that Ezra's confession not only was his own being humbled before the Lord, but caused those who saw him to likewise want to humble themselves before the Lord.

And surely you've had this experience in your own Christian life. Someone has confessed sin and your thought has been, how much do I need to confess my sin? You've thought to yourself, I am humbled by this individual's humility. I want to hate my sin more. I want to fight my sin more. That's what happens in chapter 10 verse 1.

By the spirit, this confession of Ezra was contagious. women, other Israelite men, even children are said to have gathered around and wept over the sins of the people. But We see that when you confess your sins, you must act on that confession. That repentance, in other words, is to be proven by the fruit, that you are to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And so you see this begin to happen by this individual Shekeniah in verse two. He speaks up and he says, we have broken faith with our God. and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land. But even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. Therefore, verse three, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children.

And so you see that there was this action that was in keeping with their repentance. It was not a bare confession, but a confession that led to an action. Now why is it that Shekinah here can say that they have hope? I mean surely it's in relation at some level or another to that sacrifice that had been offered back in chapter 9 verse 4 and verse 5 but also it seems in the most direct context to be related to the fact that they had seeing their sin. Their eyes had been opened to acknowledge their sin.

That brings about a level of hope. Hope in this way. They were able to diagnose the issue. They were not living in a way that was saying, oh, we don't have any problems. They were acknowledging that they had sin, and that did not alleviate their sin, but it did bring hope that they might be able to actually address it and deal with it now. You might think of it this way.

When someone has cancer and they don't know it, they might appear very healthy and be doing quite well, But they are in great danger. But when they find out they have cancer, they now at least have the hope of addressing the

issue. They might have had a smile on their face before cancer. And they might have a frown on their face when they find out they have cancer. And that might look difficult and discouraging on their face.

But the reality is now there is hope because they see there is a problem and there's someone that might be able to address it. And so Matthew Henry brings out this point that when they began to see their sin, while they wept, there was still hope. Matthew Henry puts it this way. He says, the sin that troubles you will not ruin you. Because it's disturbing. You see it. You want to deal with it. You want to address the issue. And so there was this hope. We see we have a problem. We can address it by God's grace.

So in your own life, praise God for conviction of sin. No one I don't believe. enjoys conviction of sin. No one in the moment says this feels good. But conviction of sin is a blessed work of the Holy Spirit. That means there's still life, there's still hope, there's an issue, a real sin, a real breaking of God's holy law in your life. And he loves you enough to show it to you so you can call it out. Call out your sins. Don't pretend like they're not there. Address them head on. and talk about them sincerely before your heavenly father, confess them to him."

Well, they make an oath in verses three through five that they are going to Take this seriously, that they are going to call out their sins, that they are going to deal with them. A side note that I find as an encouragement in verse 4 is this, Shekeniah says to Ezra this in verse 4, Even Ezra was at least helped, if not greatly strengthened, by the fact that he knew he wasn't going to be alone in this task. Shekeniah says, we're going to come behind you, we're going to be with you, which is just a good simple reminder that even strong leaders need strong supporters when they're called to do hard things in the life of the church. And these men were going to be behind him. So they make a commitment, we're going to address this issue, to put away our sins, we're going to call them out and address them. But secondly, you see this, put away your sin by receiving church discipline, by receiving church discipline.

And this is verses 6 through 17. As you turn to these verses, verses 6 through 17, you see something that is very reminiscent of church discipline. Ezra in verse 6 begins to mourn and fast. He spends a day longer in private prayer and fasting in verse 6.

And then in verse 7 and 8 we learn that a proclamation is made throughout all Judah that everyone who's guilty of this sin needs to come and gather in Jerusalem within three days. And it's so serious that the text tells us in verse 8, if you don't show up, you're going to forfeit your property. And additionally, you are going to be banned from the congregation of the exiles. Verse 8. This word banned that is used in verse 8 is the word that can often be translated separated.

So you can think of Genesis 1-4 where God separates the light from the darkness, that's this word band. You can actually just look back to Ezra chapter 9 verse 1 towards the end of verse 1 in Ezra 9 this same word band is used. And there we read that the people have not quote separated, that's our word band, themselves from the people of the land. Or again in chapter 10 verse 11 we read this. And chapter 10 verse 11, now then make confession to the Lord the God of your fathers and do his will.

Separate, there's our word, separate yourselves from the peoples of the land. And so this idea that they're going to be banned or separated from the congregation of the people of Israel, God's people, what it's telling you is this.

They had this choice before them, either this, either you separate yourself from the foreign women or you separate yourself from God's church. You separate yourself from the exiles. You, in plain terms, excommunicate yourself. You declare yourself from all human perception to be an unbeliever and you are to be thought of in that manner by the congregation of God, should you not be willing to separate yourself. Then in verses 9 through 15, continuing on with this church discipline section, you see that they did actually show themselves willing to receive this discipline. Praise the Lord!

That seems at least the vast majority of them, No, it appears in the text, did receive this, they did gather within three days. And they come, and in verse 11, Ezra says to them this, Now then, make confession to the Lord, the God of your fathers, and do his will.

What's so interesting about this particular word translated confession here in Ezra 10 11, what's so interesting about this word is it's used 32 times in the Old Testament. And in the vast majority of the other uses, it is translated either praise or thanks.

So it's been said by one commentator, the expression make confession to the Lord can also be translated thank the Lord. Now, How is it that a word that can indeed mean confession but often really means thanks or praise can be used here when Ezra is exhorting these people to confess their sins, to separate themselves? How could that be something that could bring praise to God? How is it something that could lead them to thanking God? But what it means is this, when you confess your sins, beloved, when you abandon them and confess them to the Lord, you are simultaneously worshiping God.

You are praising Him and giving thanks to Him. How so? Well, in a number of ways, you're willing to say, He's right and I'm wrong. You're willing to say that he is the authority and he knows what he is talking about in his law when he tells me X, Y, or Z. And so you're exalting him, you're praising him, but you're also thanking him because you're saying at the same time, Lord, you can do something about this. You can handle my sin. You can address it. You can forgive me. You can make atonement. You can sanctify me. You can grow me.

And so your confession is at the same time a thanking to God for all he does for his people. But then we see the people receiving this exhortation from Ezra. In verse 12, they agree with Ezra. They say, it is so. They don't argue with him or pretend like it's not the case. And they even go so far as to say, we must do as you have said. So they're serious.

This has to be addressed. We can't continue on in this way. But then in verses 13 through 15, we read about how there were these harsh rains and these very cold, it was very cold, quite literally. It was December, it's raining, it's cold, they're outside, and they say, we do need to have this addressed, we are willing to have this addressed, but the magnitude of the people and the nature of the sin and the circumstances, this weather, this cold, cold weather, let this be dealt with in a more individual case-by-case basis. Let this be dealt with in a timely manner, not a hasty manner. Let us address this a bit more slowly, but still with all the zeal that you are asking."

And there were four men in verse 15 who disagreed with this, but only four. So that was a presbytery meeting. It's a pretty good number if you only have four dissenting votes. There were not a lot of people who disagreed, only four. That also does tell you something, though, about church discipline.

It's going to be hard. I don't know why these four men disagreed. Maybe they said, you guys aren't being harsh enough. Off with their heads. Deal with it right now. Don't let the rain be an excuse. I don't care if they're cold. They should have thought about that before they did what they did, right? Or maybe their attitude was more of an attitude of, it's not that big of a deal. We don't need to address this. Come on. We don't need to take it that seriously.

Whatever their reason was, there were four dissenters. Church discipline is always going to be very, very difficult, but it is good. And you see in verse 16 and 17 that they do deal with it the way the people had recommended. They do establish some leaders to deal with this case by case. It takes them roughly three months to address all the different cases. The number of cases, which are listed in verses 18 through 44, amount to about 110 cases. Whether those were representative of the whole or whether that is the whole, we know there are at least 110 cases. Notice this section on church discipline teaches us a few things about church discipline.

It needs to be done honestly and graciously. There is honesty all over Ezra 10. The way that Ezra addresses them in verse 11. He doesn't hold back. He doesn't tell them it's not a big deal. He does address it honestly, very bluntly. But it's also done graciously.

He's doing it graciously in that he says with that word confession in verse 11, that particular word he's using, he's saying to them, when you do this, beloved, when you confess your sins, you're going to praise God. That's an encouragement to them to do it, to confess it, because they can be simultaneously thanking God for the forgiveness of sins found in Christ Jesus, the promised Messiah to come. They can be agreeing with God and his infinite wisdom and the law that he has given. So they can be encouraged by this gracious reminder, not beating them up in any way, but in this way of saying, as you confess, you are giving thanks and praising God. But also it's done graciously in that it was not administered hastily.

Oftentimes when trying to deal with things it can be the heart of all of us, and the church is no exception, to get hasty just to want to get it done. But they're dealing with souls and they're dealing with real issues here and so they can't just hastily make a universal decision. They go case by case, three months, 110 different cases. They deal with it, it takes time and effort. I'm sure it was difficult.

But this is the way church discipline should be administered. They receive this church discipline and it helps them to put away their sin. Now, in the life of Second Presbyterian Church, if there's ever a time where church discipline needs to be administered in your life, if ever there should be a time where at the Presbytery level there should be church discipline administered in my life, we need to be able to receive that discipline, it is for our good. But additionally we need to know that according to our book of church order and rightly so in the scriptures that there is informal and formal church discipline. What we're dealing with here is formal technical church discipline. But every single time you sit under the preached word, every single time you see the administration of the sacraments, you are under informal church discipline.

You are being instructed, right? You're being instructed how you are to live. You are to take the sermons preached, like Hunter preached from 1 Thessalonians 2 the other day on a received the word of God. You are to hear the word of God. You are to receive it. That's a discipline. That's an instruction. So every time you're under the preached word, particularly in corporate worship. You are under informal discipline, instruction, telling you, here's how we are to live.

Here's who Christ is. Will we trust him? Will you believe him? These sorts of things. This is informal church discipline. And in all the various ways church discipline is administered, whether formal or informal, it is for our good that we might put away our sins. That you might say, I want to not continue in this thing. I want to put it away. I don't want it in my life any longer.

But thirdly tonight, put away your sin by cherishing Christ. By cherishing Christ, verses 18 through 44. Now, above all else, dear ones, you put away sin by cherishing the Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ is more lovely in your sight than your sin, you will put it away. When Christ is more precious in your sight than your sin, you will put it away. Because Christ is better. Jesus is more important.

And you might think, how in the world are these people willing to put away their wives? and even those who had children put away their children. How in the world is this possible in Ezra chapter 10? Well I'm sure it was hard for many of them but you have to know the only way this was possible had to have been that they believed in the promised Messiah who was to come who was better than anything this world had to offer them. You have to believe that in some way they understood what Christ would later say, if anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. By God's grace, they knew something so good that they were willing to put away these, their wives and their children. They knew something that was so good it was worth giving up everything to follow, and that something must have been their knowledge insofar as it had been granted to them of the promised Messiah to come.

Now, as a quick aside, according to the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 7, if a believer is married to an unbeliever, the believer should not seek divorce. Why that seeming change? We can talk after the sermon if you want my opinion. But the point that you want to take from Ezra 10 is not, if you're here and you were married to an unbeliever, you know someone who is, to tell them, go ahead and put away your wife.

We know from 1 Corinthians 7 that that is not how we are to operate at this time in redemptive history. However, the point that you got to take away from Ezra 10 that is so clear is that you have to give up everything to follow Christ. He's got to be better to you than everything else. He's got to be glorious, so glorious, so grand that nothing is worth holding on to if it's going to keep you from following him. That is the point that you see here by their example. Now a few particular things to note about verses 18 through 44. In verses 18 through 22, the priests are addressed first.

And that's telling because there's no cover up in the Bible for the church. The Bible doesn't sidestep the priests and tell you the priest, you know, the leaders in the church, they were the good guys and it was everybody else who was

rotten. The Bible goes straight for the jugular. The Bible here starts with listing off the priests. Sometimes in the church today you read stories of cover-ups.

God did not deal with cover-ups. He did not pretend like even the leaders of the church were not sinners. And what that tells you is something fascinating about Christ. Because the Bible always deals honestly with people. And the Bible tells you Christ was sinless. You can believe the Bible. when it tells you that Christ was a man without sin.

But then you see in verses 23 and 24, it addresses the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, then the lay people, and verses 25 through 44. But then the book comes to this somewhat abrupt, jolting close, verse 44. All these had married foreign women, and some of the women had even born children. Well, what does this teach us, this abrupt ending? It teaches us at least these two things.

First, it teaches us that our greatest threat is not without, your greatest threat is within. Your greatest threat is not without, your greatest threat is within. The greatest threat to the church is not persecution. The greatest threat to the church is ourselves.

For six chapters, Ezra 1 through 6, They faced one level of persecution after another. And every single time from without, God delivered them. We get to the end. They're in Jerusalem. Things are circumstantially good. No one's trying to knock down their doors. No one's threatening not to help them in their lives like before. No one's trying to hinder them in their earthly pursuits.

And yet there's still a war waging on and it's their hearts against their sin. And so let this be a reminder to all here tonight. to remember the potential in our own hearts to go away from God, to disobey Him, that when your circumstances are good, you are still in a war, the war against your own sin, the war against the flesh, the war against your own heart, and the tendency to turn against God and to sin against Him.

But this abrupt ending also teaches us something else. It screams humanity needs a Savior. When you get to the end of this book, they're finally in Jerusalem, like I said. They finally have circumstances that are pretty good, but yet they're lacking. Yet they're not fulfilled. Yet there's still a sense in which they're not redeemed, even though they're back in the promised land.

And that's because they needed Jesus Christ. They needed atonement. They needed a Savior. And you have to imagine when they got to this place, they realized that. They had to know that they needed a Christ. They needed the Messiah. They needed the Lamb of God who was going to come and take away their sins. And so, it's screaming to you Humanity needs a Savior. I need a Savior.

And the Savior they needed, they could only know, as we've seen from Hebrews 1, in types and shadows. We, beloved, live in the age of fulfillment. You can see the substance in a fuller way than they could have in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, when I contemplated verses 18 through 44 this week, I thought to myself, wouldn't that be embarrassing if the only reason your name was in the Bible is because you had a bunch of foreign wives? The only reason your name was in the Bible is because you were a rotten, rotten sinner. And then I realized how good it would be to be one of the people on this list. because these men are not in verses 18 through 44 because they had foreign wives. They're in verses 18 through 44 because they repented of their sins. There may have been other people who didn't show up, who don't have their names in these verses. They might have kept the things of this world and forfeited eternal life.

Every person here, you have every reason to believe you will one day be within glory because they repented, because they believed that they really had sinned, because they believed God's ways really were better and so they put away these things that were entangling them and keeping them from living for God.

Beloved, you should not be embarrassed if in your heart you know you're one of these people. You should be honored because it means you're repenting of your sins. It means that you don't want to pretend and you don't want to keep on doing it. You want to fight, you want to grow, you want to be more like Jesus. That is why these people are in this list.

Be honored if you know, though your sins are great, you don't love them and you want to love Christ and you do, though so feebly and imperfectly as all do until glory. Well, put away your sins, put away your sins by calling out your sins, by receiving church discipline, and above all else, by cherishing Christ. Let us pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we ask that we here at Second Presbyterian Church would be among those who, by your grace, are sincerely putting away our sins. Oh, Lord God, everyone has more sins to put away than they know. And everyone who knows their sins knows that they've never put them away as fully and as completely and as perfectly as we would wish. But, O God, we plead with Thee that all of us here would be among those who are putting away sin, calling the sin of our life sin, receiving whatever sort of formal or informal church discipline we might need, and above all else, we would be cherishing Christ such that if we should have sin we know is keeping us from Him, we would give it up Give it up because he is so much better that there is no sin we could ever have that would compare to the pearl of great price.

Oh, God, where there is anyone here tonight who is not repenting, who doesn't want to repent and doesn't care. We pray for conviction and for all here who are repenting. and are being convicted and do keep repenting and do keep fighting, we praise you and I pray for them that you would give them endurance to press on. Let them not be so overwhelmed by their failures that they forget the faithfulness of their savior. But oh God, I pray that they would keep repenting, keep fighting, keep turning, keep going to Christ for he indeed does not leave or forsake his people. His blood is sufficient for the phallus as we sang in our opening hymn. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.