

"REVIVING MARRIAGES" - PT. 1 - EZRA 9

INTRO:

TAKE HOME: HOW you deal with issues is just as important as THAT you deal with issues.

THE PROBLEM ENCOUNTERED: (9:1-2)

1-2) Nowhere in scripture do we find that God is against interracial marriages. In fact, we find some interracial marriages at times among those we call "heroes of the faith" (Ex. **Moses** was married to a Midianite woman...Joseph was married to an Egyptian woman...Boaz was married to Ruth, a Moabite).

What we do find is that God is against marriages of His people with pagan influences.

Why was this such a big deal? 1) PROPHECY - God promised that the Messiah would come through the Jewish line. Satan thinks that if he can "dilute it & pollute it", maybe he can stop it. No Messiah, no salvation from sin! Obviously Satan can't stop God's plans. God preserved His people & Jesus came to save.

2) HISTORICALLY - in the OT - The Jews were a covenant people of God, set apart to be holy to the Lord. Because they intermarried with the ungodly nations around them, they ended up leaving God & following pagan practices & worshipping idols. (King Solomon of Israel is a testimony of this)

...As a result, God sent the nation off to captivity in Babylon. 70 years pass, now they are back in the land, and they go back to their old ways (as if they didn't learn the lesson!)...that is why this issue was a serious one in Ezra's eyes! **From the leaders & priests down to the common people - it was "accepted" as normal behavior instead of sinful.**

"But I don't live in OT times. How does this apply to me?"

in the NT...God is still against marriages of believers with unbelievers. Those under that new covenant in Christ are called to holiness.

2 Cor. 6:14-18. "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." Therefore, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

NOTE: Those believers who marry unbelievers have simply forgotten the richness & value of that identity in Christ. They've forgotten that God is in a relationship with them & wants them holy and set apart to Jesus. They've forgotten that God called them out of the deadness of the world to Himself. They've often compartmentalized their lives - that God can dictate certain areas, but they get to govern others (including feelings & relationships). In the end that choice effects the marriage & family in a negative way.

SIDENOTE: If you got married to an unbeliever and were not saved at the time, then it's a different story. You are now learning to be that godly witness to your spouse and honor that marriage covenant before God. It's a challenge, but you aren't being godly and winning God's favor by now divorcing them. God holds that marriage covenant high. Why? Because **whether you both know Jesus or not, the institution of marriage testifies of a relationship with God.**

Eph. 5:31-32 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church."

That is why the enemy tries so hard to destroy marriages! At the core - it testifies of a relationship with God. And when done right it is attractive to lost sinners.

so seeing this problem, what does Ezra do that we can take to heart for our marriages?

THE RESPONSE FROM EZRA: (9:3-15)

3-4) Response #1 - GRIEF

Instead of first preaching at them, and hammering them for their sin, Ezra starts with personal grief. **He shows his heart before he shows his hand.**

He is tearing the **garments & robe** (sign of mourning)...pulling out his **hair and beard** (pain associated with it all)...**sitting down astonished** ("to be appalled & stupefied" - shock and awe of what is happening). This hit him like a ton of bricks! And he sat that way until the **evening sacrifice** (3 pm). People saw his response and gathered around.

How do you respond when you hear of sinful behavior in a person or a marriage? Don't shrug it off and say "Oh, well. I can't do anything about it." Or "It's their decision. Who am I to tell them it's wrong?"

Listen, when a brother or sister falls into sin...when a believer is set on marrying an unbeliever - you should respond. And your first response is to weep & grieve in your heart! It's not what God wants for them.

Luke 19:41-45 (Jesus' example). "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you." When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling."

NOTE: Weep before you whip! Mourn deeply before you act to correct sinful behavior openly. Be broken over sin you see, before you seek to fix things publicly. Weep first, then you'll be able to change lives from a point of brokenness.

when we weep and grieve over sin, it softens the hearts of the people that need correction. They know your actions toward them stem from a brokenness over sin, from a righteousness found in God's Word, from a love for them as a person before God. **Correction is not about getting my idea in place, but God's glory restored in that life.**

5) Response #2 - PRAYER

Ezra went from sitting astonished and grieving over sin..., to on his knees with hands spread out to God in prayer ABOUT the sin. He's begging God for help...broken by their sinfulness.

Do you pray over the sin you see? Do you go to God or do you go to friends, books, podcasts on fixing a broken marriage. You'll get advice anywhere you go - some good, some bad. But why not go to the one who invented marriage, rather than the ones still trying to figure it all out?

Ps. 61:1-2 "Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I."

What's in his prayer?

6-7) First - we see **CONFESSION**. Sin brings shame, humiliation, and guilt. "Drowning in sin" - higher than our heads. This isn't something new - it has been going on for awhile now (bad habit in us)...this is the reason why some were killed, humiliated, or driven off to captivity.

what's he doing? He's praying out loud so that people understand their history or sinful behavior, and the Biblical reasoning behind his actions. He's confessing sinful behavior and calling sin, sin.

Time out - Ezra isn't involved in this sinful behavior? He's not intermarrying with ungodly spouse? So why is he saying "us" and "our"? As a "helper" he is taking the burden of sin upon himself, identifying with his nation and interceding for his people. So does our heavenly helper (the Holy Spirit) (Romans 8 - intercedes for us before the throne of God with groaning which cannot be uttered)

NOTE: For sin to be dealt with rightly, there must be a confession of it first. If I want a revived marriage I must start with calling out sinful behaviors (what are you neglecting that should be in place? What are you allowing that is sinful? Confess it to God!)

From confession of sin in prayer, we go to **RECOGNITION** in prayer...

8-9). Ezra recognizes how gracious God has been to them as a people...a remnant is alive...we have a place of worship (Temple) for God to speak to us and revive us! He hasn't abandoned us in our sin.

9) sin brought us to slavery, but God extended to us His mercy! Mercy through the king of Persia, mercy in rebuilding the Temple & repairing the ruins & building a wall of protection.

NOTE: Ezra is recounting to everyone all the God has done in spite of their sinful behavior. The grace, the protection, the provisions, the mercy show over and over in various ways. How God restores and rebuilds what we ruined... (Romans 2:4 - it's the kindness of God that leads us to repentance.)

NOTE: once you've confessed the sin, then focus on how good and gracious God has been. In your life...in your family...in your marriage. He constantly is wanting to forgive us and revive us... He's just waiting for us to own up to the mess we've made.

With eyes upon God's goodness, Ezra says in v. 10

10a) sometimes the overwhelming goodness of God and the ugly sinfulness of our hearts collide head on and we are speechless..."what can I say?". No excuses...no explanations...no exceptions...absolutely crushed by sin in light of who Jesus is.

He goes on and says why...

10b-12). He takes them back to God's Word, God's commands (Ex. 34:11-16; Deut. 7:1-4). This is a Biblical stance, not a cultural one. God told them not to intermarry with the pagan nations in the land when they came into it. How they lived was **uncleanness** in God's eyes. It was an **abomination** to God with all the idolatry, sexual immorality, and evil practices. It filled the whole land from one end to the other. And God was cleaning house and judging those nations through Israel at that time - wiping them out for their sin.

12) the Word of God to them was simple - "don't compromise with sin, kill it!" And then you will be blessed, the land will bless you and your family and kids.

NOTE: how you respond to sin has a trickle effect not only in your marriage, but upon your kids. So don't play around with it...don't compromise with it. Call it out and take it to the cross and kill it there! Then your kids will be blessed and you'll experience rest & fruitfulness for your family. Gal. 5:24. "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

From confession of sin...to a recognition of who God is along with brokenness over what we've done... a recognition that we have disobeyed God's Word & plans...now Ezra points out this **REALIZATION**...

13-14) if God punished us before for this, wouldn't He do it again? To ignore sin and continue in our ways is to call for God's judgment & no one would survive. (To Ezra this is not a slap on the hand, but a grave situation)

15). In this prayer, Ezra doesn't make promises to do better. He doesn't make excuses or reasons for their compromise. He owns the fault and then humbly and simply confesses the sin. He shows how God is right & we are wrong. And if God doesn't act in mercy to help us, we are done for!

What a great prayer for all the ages to read and follow...not only for marriages that need reviving, but lives that are captivated in sin.

Next week we will see how the people responded to what they saw & heard from Ezra.

RECAP: "How to revive your marriage"

1) *identify the problem - sin in the camp. Decisions, directions, words, hearts, etc. Sin never blesses, it only rips off! It appeals to the flesh, justifies emotions, but causes enormous destruction. Because it's against God & His Word.*

2) *Grieve over sin - let it sink in deeply...let it grip you & rip you up. James 4:9-10 - lament, mourn, weep over sin. Humble yourselves and God will lift you up.*

3) *Confess it - call it out! No more excuses. Honor God's Word and He will honor you & your marriage.*

4) *Recognize God's goodness in spite of your sinfulness...He is a good God even when we are off. Beg God for mercy. He is ready to give it!*

5) *Realize that all sin must be judged. God doesn't overlook it & neither should you. That is what the cross is for - to pay the price for sin, to break the power of sin, and to set us free to live for Him. He is the God of restoration.*

PRAY