

## Ezra 9-10 Resurrection Grace

The digital revolution is upon us in dramatic ways, especially in terms of our media consumption. Helpful in the ways that we can stay connected too each other, and wonderful in the sense that we can instantly know what's going on in the world. But one of the downsides to the digital revolution is that we as humans are being bombarded with more messages and news than ever before. The brain is having to filter and sift through massive amounts of content every day. I read this week that the average American consumes 10 hours a day of media. That's everything from newspaper, to radio, to social media. As I was thinking about this this week realizing that there is this numbing effect that happens because there is so much and because it is so constant, you really don't have time to process anything. And so news rarely penetrates into our hearts the way it should.

Especially in terms of tragedies, there another school shooting, another bombing, another natural disaster, and it fails to penetrate. I would assume your experience is a bit like mine, I see some of these things, and it almost grieves me, why is my heart not responding, I mean shouldn't I be weeping.

Of course everything changes when that story becomes personal. When you know someone involved. That happened this week, one of our members has a brother stationed where the bomb went off in Afghanistan. That made it more real. It had to become personal.

And this is the same way when it comes to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is news. The best of all news. And the real tragedy is when we hear the news but it doesn't penetrate our hearts. Because until it does, it means nothing and we don't benefit by it.

I don't want this Easter to just blitz by and the resurrection story just be one more piece of information flung your way that you give a head nods to, click like, maybe even share it, and then move on without any real change. We need to enter the story of the resurrection and we need its story to enter us. Easter must become personal.

To get there, we are going to look at 3 aspects of the resurrection. First, we need to embrace our need for the resurrection, then to savor the gift of the resurrection, and third, to walk in the power of the resurrection.

Let's pray.

### 1. Embrace your need for the resurrection

God brings His people out of Egypt, gives them the promise land. They disobey. God sends them to timeout for 70 years in Babylon. A first wave of the people return. Then a second wave led by Ezra, as Ezra is coming back to check on the people to make sure they are following God.

**After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have 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:**

**"O my God, I am ashamed and blush 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.**

The crime committed here may first strike our ears as strange... the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands (this is their faithlessness).

The reason this is evidence of faithlessness has nothing to do with ethnicity and has everything to do with worship. Let me say that again. Faithlessness has nothing to do with ethnicity and has everything to do with worship.

To understand the underpinnings of this, you have to get the whole story in view. In the very beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and created man, placing man in a garden, and God and man dwelled in perfect harmony. God needed nothing from man, God created man in order that God may bless man with Himself. The design of man in creation was that man would enjoy God forever.

However that blessing was conditional upon man's obedience. To enjoy God we have to obey God. Our first man Adam disobeys and the whole human race is cursed with sin from that point on.

But, God gives a very special promise in Gen. 3:15, that from the line of Eve would come a seed to crush the serpent. This gives shape and structure to the whole rest of the Bible.

From that day on man is looking for the One to come, to help bring man back into right relationship with God (with each other, and with creation), to undo all the affects of sin—to paradise.

As Genesis continues we get clues as to where this seed is going to come from. The big clue that we get is when God calls Abraham and say, Abraham, I have chosen you, and called you, I will bless you and your family will be blessed and through you I will bless all the nations. So God's game plan is to work through one family to bless all others.

This family is what would later become Israel.

So this is how God is choosing to redeem the whole world... through Abraham and his offspring. Claims of racism that would be built off of God's special dealings with Israel have absolutely zero biblical support. Such arguments fail to see that God calls people out of His own grace, not because of anything special about one's race. It's God's grace that is special, not the race. Israel had nothing to offer.

And also because they fail to see God's ultimate mission. That in choosing Israel, God is keeping His promise to the whole world. The point of choosing Israel is because that's how God has sovereignly decided to bless all the nations. They are blessed to be a blessing. That's how God's election always works.

So when we come to a text like we do today, there are some important things we have to grasp. God is not about ethnicity, He's about worship, that's what is at stake. The only way that Israel was going to be a blessing to the nations, was if they worshiped God. As they worshiped God, they were a blessing to others. As they worshiped other gods, they failed to be a blessing to others.

Why? because this is primarily what every human needs. Every human on planet earth was created to worship God. This is the design—to worship and enjoy God. That's the ultimate blessing. (illust.)

Mixing with other peoples is the same way of saying worshiping other people's gods. God's not against the foreigner in a fundamental sense. He loves the foreigner. His mission is to bless the foreigner, that's the whole point. What God is not about, is His people going and worshiping other gods. It would have been one thing if the peoples of the land all decided to repent and worship Yahweh, but that's not what's happening. No, the Israelites have forgotten God and gone after idols.

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Here's the point. We must see ourselves this morning as the Israelites, having abandoned God and mixed ourselves with the world. We have left worship of the One True God and have worshiped other false gods. You might say? No I haven't, I'm not bowing down to any idols.

Tim Keller has been very helpful here. Listen to what he says,  
*"(An idol) is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give. . . Idolatry is not just a failure to obey God, it is a setting of the whole heart on something besides God..."*

*...family, children, career, achievement, romantic relationship, physical beauty, money, a political or social cause, your moral record, your ministry success, religiosity, popularity... You know something has become an idol when you lose it you want to throw yourself over a bridge, you demand it at all costs. That's how you know it's an idol in your life.*

*"When an idol gets a grip on your heart, it spins out a whole set of false definitions of success and failure and happiness and sadness. It redefines reality in terms of itself."*

This morning for us to begin understanding anything about the resurrection, we have to be able to embrace this last verse... our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. Do you believe you have sinned against God?

Have you come to a place like Ezra, who tears his garments and pulls out his own hair! Or the people, that tremble. We must tremble before God because of our sin. Because sin deserves judgement from an infinitely holy God.

Clines points out that it was customary in times of distress to rend one's garment, but Ezra's response showed extreme grief. Such "stylized stripping oneself naked" was a "token of humiliation and death."<sup>10</sup>

The full weight of their lives are placed on the mercy of God. This is like the story in the NT of the two men that came to the Temple. When the religious man comes and says, thank you God that I am not like others. I fast and pray and give. Then there's the tax collector, who it says, standing far off from the temple, would not even raise his head and only said, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Jesus says, I'll tell you who went away justified, and it was not the man who had it all together. A broken and contrite heart God will never cast away.

The tax collector realized that he was morally bankrupt and could do no good thing. That has to be us this morning. We have to realize that our iniquities have risen higher than our heads.

Once we embrace our guilt as our great need, we must then...

## **2. Savor the grace in the resurrection**

**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 today.**

**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.**

The Israelites are experiencing a sort of Easter of their own. Israel had been destroyed, the people exiled, things were for the most part dead. They were slaves in foreign land under a foreign king. But now, out of nowhere comes the sovereign, loving hand of God, to bring them back to the promise land and to have the temple rebuilt. God works through their unbelieving king.

Ezra begins with the people's faithlessness and moves to God's faithfulness. He continues...

**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."**

Ezra is saying, "What Grace Oh God! What grace that you would do this!" That you would give us a second chance! That you didn't just wipe us off the planet. And what grace God that you have given us back land and are preserving us and rebuilding us. And how did we respond? We disobeyed, again. We fell right back into our old habits. We relapsed. You poured out grace on us and we rebelled. (illustration - kids)

Ezra acknowledges here that God's justice would destroy them, none can stand before you because of this. The only expectation is judgement and wrath.

Unless, however, God's love comes breaking through. Unless there is someone else to pay the price. Unless there is a substitute. Unless there is One to bear the full weight of their punishment, a way to divert God's judgment (illustration - armegeddon)..

You see it is interesting here in our text, and Ezra's is particular about it, that God is preserving a remnant. Well that remnant was not just so the Israelites can feel better about themselves. The remnant is being preserved because God is faithful to His mission to bless the whole world.

Remember His promise, that a seed would come through Eve, and that seed would come through the family of Abraham, and then down through the line of David, finding it's fulfillment in the person of Jesus.

God's mission would climax as this seed, Jesus, dies in the place of sinners. When Christ died on the cross, He took our sin. When Christ rose from the dead, He justified and made us righteous forever. We have been raised with Christ, sealed with the Holy Spirit. The world has hope. One day there will be a new Heavens and a New Earth with Jesus at the center of it.

Ezra is a foreshadow of Jesus in the OT. He was innocent, but we see him taking on the sin of the people as he claims their sin as his own. He doesn't point the finger, he owns it. That is what Jesus does for us. He doesn't come to judge us, He comes to identify with us, the righteous one to bear our sin and shame

This is the glorious news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ in the place of sinners. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

And we had nothing to do with it except for the sin which made salvation necessary. This was God initiated. God fulfilled. Man initiated condemnation, God initiated redemption.

Do you savor and enjoy the grace in Easter? You have been given the greatest gift in all the universe, Christ Himself. Grace has come to you, and grace is here today this morning for you.

There is grace here this morning for you to see all your sin on Christ. Every last bit of it. Can you imagine looking for sin and not finding any? well that's what the gospel holds out to you, you don't find it in yourself because you find it on the cross of Christ (as col. says, the record of debt that stood against you was nailed to the cross). You aren't guilty anymore.

The resurrection is Gods confirmation that the sacrifice was good. You are new.

Okay, so what now, we've embraced our need for the resurrection, tasted the grace in it, now what?

### 3. Walk in the power of the resurrection

**10:1 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. 2 And Shecaniah 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. 3 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. (And the rest of the chapter shows them following through)**

Now we move and see the people's response to Ezra's prayer. It's a response of repentance. There is the confession of guilt. There is the acknowledgement of God's grace. And v. 3 is the active response of obedience.

What's beautiful about the gospel is that it's always in this order— God saves you, and then you obey. If that order gets reversed the gospel is destroyed. No good news. So even here, obedience is a response to God's grace, not a prerequisite for it.

And so as an act of obedience the Israelites seek to undo all the intermarriages with the land. God hates divorce and that's clear in the NT, this passage is not prescriptive but is an isolated case of God preserving His Name among His people, so don't anyone get any ideas here.

The first response to the resurrection is repentance, it is to walk in holiness. Being saved does not mean that God no longer cares about sin. He loves you too much to let you continue walking in sin.

**6:1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.**

So the first response to the resurrection is holiness, but there's a second response, and that's mission. We hear mission and we might clam up or get afraid, but that's usually because we just don't really understand the weight of what is happening. Mission is really the natural result of rightly interpreting the resurrection. When Jesus comes out of the grave, the people don't have to get together and have a conference or hold a prayer meeting to try to figure out if they should tell others what just happened.

I mean it's total pandemonium! Jesus was just crucified, I watched His flesh get ripped off his body, I saw Him get stabbed, He was put in a grave, and three days later the guy just walked out. In other words, Jesus is the Messiah, He's who He says He was, sins are forgiven, and the whole world will one day be restored to Paradise, forever.

You don't have to think about whether or not you should tell someone that. And the first disciples RAN to tell others. Have you heard? Did you hear? Can you believe what just happened? We've lost a sense of the weight of this moment.

And that's essentially all the mission is about. The gospel means news. It's turning on the news channel and the ticker says, Jesus is the Messiah, sins are forgiven in His blood, and redemption for the whole world is happening. It's news.

And the way we live our lives (holiness) helps us to make beautiful the news, to showcase it.

See how 1 Peter 2:9 puts these together... and it's very interesting, this is written to christian exiles in a very similar context as to what the Israelites in Ezra time would have faced.

**1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.**

**10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.**

The remnant in Ezra's day was a foreshadow of the church. Israel the nation would fail to be the light to the nations, they would fail to walk in holiness. Christ would fulfill the mission to bless the world through the church. We are the remnant, made holy by His blood. We as the church are the new remnant, we are the new race, to walk out the Holiness of God, the mission of God, to be a blessing to all nations.

How might your life change if you believed 100% that Jesus was alive?? How might that affect your pursuits in life? Job, family, sex, pleasure. How might this affect your mission in life?

## **Conclusion**

Christ is our perfect hope this morning. We will even fail to embrace our sin. We will certainly fail to savor the grace of God, and we certainly will fail at living out His mission in the world, let us continually look to and hope in Christ's death and resurrection for our justification before God and for our power to live a life that rightly reflects just how great a gift the resurrection is.

Jesus is the true and better Ezra. And Jesus is the faithful Israelite who has kept Himself pure and who is faithful to His bride, the church.

Let's pray.