

## **“A Remnant” (Ezra 9) (8.29.21)**

Ezra 9 (NIV84)

**9** After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, “The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. <sup>2</sup>They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness.”

<sup>3</sup>When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled. <sup>4</sup>Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered around me because of this unfaithfulness of the exiles. And I sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice.

<sup>5</sup>Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the Lord my God <sup>6</sup>and prayed:

“O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens. <sup>7</sup>From the days of our forefathers until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins, we and our kings and our priests have been subjected to the sword and captivity, to pillage and humiliation at the hand of foreign kings, as it is today.

<sup>8</sup>“But now, for a brief moment, the Lord our God has been gracious in leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place in his sanctuary, and so our God gives light to our eyes and a little relief in our bondage. <sup>9</sup>Though we are slaves, our God has not deserted us in our bondage. He has shown us kindness in the sight of the kings of Persia: He has granted us new life to rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins, and he has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem.

<sup>10</sup>“But now, O our God, what can we say after this? For we have disregarded the commands <sup>11</sup>you gave through your servants the prophets when you said: ‘The land you are entering to possess is a land polluted by the corruption of its peoples. By their detestable practices they have filled it with their impurity from one end to the other. <sup>12</sup>Therefore, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them at any time, that you may be strong and eat the good things of the land and leave it to your children as an everlasting inheritance.’

<sup>13</sup>“What has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and our great guilt, and yet, our God, you have punished us less than our sins have deserved and have given us a remnant like this. <sup>14</sup>Shall we again break your commands and intermarry with the peoples who commit such detestable practices? Would you not be angry enough with us to destroy us, leaving us no remnant or survivor? <sup>15</sup>O Lord, God of Israel, you are righteous! We are left this day as a remnant. Here we are before you in our guilt, though because of it not one of us can stand in your presence.”

### **The word of God for the people of God.**

LET US PRAY.

Title: **“A Remnant”**

INTRODUCTION:

Our Bible is a Big Book. I mean that in several ways. Being such a Big Book is a blessing and a burden.

The way we approach reading the Bible makes all the difference in the world. Listeners of my sermons know that I believe it is the very word of God. Therefore, all of it is important. There are common themes that run throughout our Bibles.

Last week, Shirley noticed that I have preached from Zechariah once each year for the last three years. She wondered if this might be a record. Out of curiosity, I searched the United Methodist Lectionary, a three-year schedule of assigned scriptures, to see how often Zechariah is used. Turns out, it is never one of the assigned texts. So, in churches that use the lectionary, the pastor does not preach from Zechariah. And, the same goes for Ezra – it is never used in the continuous three year lectionary schedule.

The reason this is a problem is that it makes it easier for people to pick and choose what they want to hear from God's word. Those that trembled at God's word gathered around Ezra to hear a word from a godly man. Ezra was no ear tickler. His heart was heavily burdened over the people's guilt. He confessed that their sin was so far over their heads it reached to heaven.

Most Christians don't tremble at the word of God because they have only been fed bite size portions by preachers who don't want to offend anyone with the Truth. Unfortunately, some of these self-deluded preachers don't even want to offend themselves. Just like King Jehoiakim from two weeks ago, they have cut out and burned those unpalatable portions.

I am committed to preaching the whole counsel of God. Of course, this must include the good news of Jesus the Christ. To fully understand why it is good news, I must also preach that we need a Savior.

Without Jesus, we would bear the wrath of our Holy Father for our sin. Sometimes, I must preach about things that make me uncomfortable because they confront and convict. Today is one of those times.

BODY:

- The biblical theme of a Remnant
  - Definition of **Remnant**. A group of people who survive a catastrophe brought about by God, ordinarily in judgment for sin. This group becomes the nucleus for the continuation of mankind or the people of God; the future existence of the larger group focuses in this purified, holy remnant that has undergone and survived the judgment of God. The remnant concept is found in all periods of redemptive history where catastrophe—be it natural disaster, disease, warfare, or other instruments—threatens the continuity of God's purposes. From the creation account to the NT, the concept is progressively sharpened.
  - **The Problem**. The theological problem which the remnant concept addresses is the tension between the grace and promises of God over against his holiness and just judgment of sin. God has chosen, created, and called a people for himself and has promised to them his unfailing grace and favor. The remnant motif addresses the tension between God's grace and his judgment by presenting a distinction between the true and false people of God and between the present and future people of God. The holy, pure, and true people of God will survive his judgment on sin as a faithful remnant and will become the nucleus of a renewed, chosen people. The purposes of God are not frustrated but are effected among that true and renewed people.

The concept is one which cuts in two directions. On the one hand, depending on the imminent expectation of the biblical author, it may emphasize judgment, that God is on the verge of destroying his people because of their sin; the remnant itself may even be threatened because the contemplated judgment is so severe. On the other hand, the fact that a remnant survives emphasizes both the grace of God, his favor shown to those he has kept safe, and the dawning of a new age and a new community, which inherits the promises of God as it springs from that remnant.

- **The concept of the remnant applied to Christ**: All the features of the remnant concept are transferred to Jesus Christ. Jesus becomes the embodiment of Israel, the faithful servant (Is 41:8, 9; 42:1; 44:1, 2; 49:1–7; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11). Unlike the remnant of the [Jewish] restoration period, he committed no sin (Is 53:9; 1 Pt 2:22). He alone could undergo the judgment of God and survive. On the cross he endured exile from the Father (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34), and on the third day he enjoyed restoration at the beginning of a new age as the nucleus of the people of God. In him the basic theological problem of the tension between the grace and justice of God is resolved.

Having survived judgment, he becomes the focus of the hopes for the continued existence of the people of God in a new kingdom, a new Israel. As the founder of that new Israel, he summons the "little flock" that will receive the kingdom (Dan 7:22, 27; Lk 12:32), and he appoints judges for the 12 tribes of Israel in the new age (Mt 19:28; Lk 22:30). Other sheep will join this Jewish fold (Jn 10:16). The church is

viewed as the Israel of that new age (Gal 6:16), the 12 tribes (Jas 1:1), “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pt 2:9).

- As Applied to the Church. The remnant concept is alluded to often in the NT as a warning to the church. Peter frequently refers to the relevance of the flood narrative for the church. Only a few were saved from the waters of the flood (1 Pt 3:20–22). False teachers are warned that God judged the angels that disobeyed, destroyed the ancient world with a flood, and rained fire on Sodom and Gomorrah; the righteous were saved while the unrighteous are held for the day of judgment (2 Pt 2:4–10). Those who say that the Day of the Lord will never come should be warned by the flood (3:3–13).

Paul also draws on the remnant motif as a warning to the church. The Israel of the wilderness generation—though they were the ones God had redeemed from Egypt—were the objects of his displeasure. Their experience warns the church against idolatry, sexual immorality, and complaining (1 Cor 10:1–10). What happened to them was an example, written down as a warning because the fulfillment of the ages has come (v 11).

- The significance of marriage cannot be ignored while studying this passage. Marriage is a continuous theme in scripture. ...
  - When Jesus was asked about divorce by the Pharisees, he pointed them to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.
  - Ten Commandments:
    - The key commandment for human relationship is to honor thy father and mother because in the home is where a child learns how to relate to God and to other human beings.
    - Some might be inclined to argue that that commandment might not require marriage, but then we have the commandment about not coveting thy neighbor’s wife.
  - Jesus’ first recorded miracle was turning water into wedding wine. The Church is called the Bride of Christ. Paul says a husband should love his wife the way Christ loves the Church. Jesus tells a parable of a wedding banquet to teach about heaven. And Revelation 19 says, “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!”
  - God’s desire that His Chosen People keep the seed holy and pure.
    - The land you are entering to possess is a land polluted by the corruption of its peoples. By their detestable practices they have filled it with their impurity from one end to the other.
    - 2 Corinthians 6:14–15 (NIV84) 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? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?
  - The assault on marriage today.
    - I am not going to give you statistics on divorce. I know all about it from my personal family: previous generations and subsequent generations.
    - Almost everyone that I have married had already lived together.
    - I see this in my own family and surely you have too.
    - The government undermines marriage in some ways.
    - Abortion, while a tremendous evil in and of itself, is also evil because it assails the natural human tendency of mother and father to sacrifice on behalf of a child.
- More of trembling at the word of God  
Isaiah 66:2 (NIV84)  
Has not my hand made all these things,

and so they came into being?”

declares the Lord.

“This is the one I esteem:

he who is humble and contrite in spirit,  
and trembles at my word.

- When someone has a low view of scripture, they do not tremble at God’s word. They are much more likely to pick and choose – a tendency which each of us must avoid. Friday, I read an article about a sermon that a West Coast Bishop recently preached. They said, and this is a very brief paraphrase, that not everything is good news to the people of today. Many things in the Bible have not stood up to the “**scrutability of the ages.**” Of course, that examination is by fallible human beings, often with personal agendas.
- One of the central issues that has caused strife in the Mainline Protestant denominations, including our very own current pending schism, is the concept of inclusiveness. Yes, the gospel of Jesus Christ is for everyone. Yes, the invitation to believe and follow Jesus is for everyone. So, the love of God, which is real and true, is separated from the biblical mandate and biblical definition of holy living; without which, no one may see God.
- We can see in today’s text, that there is an exclusiveness that God demands.
  - John 17:14-16 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.
  - John 15:19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.
  - 1 John 2:15-17 Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.

#### CONCLUSION:

I have yet to speak to you about three important aspects of today’s text: 1) The judgment of God. 2) The goodness of God. 3) The proper realization of our place before God. I will address them next week.

For today, I will leave you with these reflection questions:

1. What evidence is there in your life that your will, mind, emotions, and actions are controlled by God?
2. What are you withholding from God? Money? Children? Marriage? Time? What must you do to change this?
3. What activities or pastime do you justify because your children enjoy it, yet it takes you away from the church? What habits, attitudes, or beliefs do you rationalize that are contrary to the Word of God?
4. Are you living as part of the faithful remnant?

Amen and amen. Let us pray.

#### **Scriptural Prayer for Revival from Praying with Fire**

Oh Lord, Your people need revival; revive us again. Father, show me what it means to separate myself from the world and its ways. Teach me true surrender to You (Ezra9:1). Show me the last time I was moved to astonishment over sin, my sin, and over my church’s sin. Teach me, Lord, how to give You control of my life, my time, my thoughts, my finances, my money, my family. Lord, tomorrow teach me to do it again, afresh. May I be broken; let remorse and sorrow be evident in my life, just as it was in Ezra’s life (v. 3). Father, let me tremble at Your Word. Let conviction flow forth (v. 4). Capture me for

Your glory, just as You did with Ezra. Let me know purity—purity of speech, thoughts, and lifestyle. Let me take every thought captive unto Your glory. Teach me to fall on my knees before You, and to raise my hands in honor and out of my emptiness before You. Oh, Lord, I need You (vv. 5–6). Show me my sin. Burden me over it. Let brokenness manifest itself in me. Break down the strongholds of pride, greed, and lust. Wash me, Lord. Let me see my own humiliation (v. 6). Burden me for the condition of the church, Your bride. Oh, Lord, she is to be without spot or blemish. Purify Your church; send revival to Your church. Father, enlighten my eyes so I can know Your way and have discernment, so Your church can see (v. 8). Oh God, give us revival at any cost. Do not forsake us in our bondage. I surrender to You. Break me unto Your glory. Revive me, and extend mercy to me. As we rebuild out of the ruins, give us a wall of strong understanding, a wall of doctrinal purity, a wall of refuge (v. 9). Revive us, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.