

Third Presbyterian Church
Bible Study - Nehemiah
 Sermon 6
 Association Inventory

Ezra 9:1-4 (NIV)

¹ 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.

² 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."

³ When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled.

⁴ 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.

Ezra 10:1-4 (NIV)

¹ While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites--men, women and children--gathered around him. They too wept bitterly.

² Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, said to Ezra, "We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us. But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel.

³ Now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children, in accordance with the counsel of my lord and of those who fear the commands of our God. Let it be done according to the Law. ⁴ Rise up; this matter is in your hands. We will support you, so take courage and do it."

Questions

1. Why is peer pressure so powerful?
2. Why did God want the Israelites **not** to intermarry with their foreign neighbors?
 - A. What do you feel the implications are of your knowingly marry someone who is not a believer?
3. God does not tell us to live in isolation when we become saved.
 - A. In that case, what ways do Christians need to avoid mixing themselves with the world?
 - B. Can you have someone in your inner circle who is not saved? Why or why not?
 - C. What kind of relationships should Christians have with unbelievers?
4. **Syncretism** – The practice of merging religious beliefs and practices. The Israelites merged temple prostitution with the worship of God based on the influence of neighbors.
 - A. In your opinion, are there examples of Syncretism in the modern-day Christian Church? Explain your answers.
 - B. How can the church have new ways of worshipping or ministering while avoiding syncretism?
5. In our prayers to God, confession of sin is VERY important. Why in our confession it is important to be specific about our sin and not generalize our sin as we confess to God?
6. The sermon stated that people shy away from and don't want to sit under convicting preaching. Agree or disagree. Do you feel that is why Third Church is not growing faster? Why or why not?
7. The sermon talked about the difference between description and prescription. Meaning this is what actually happened but it's not prescribed for you to do exactly the same thing in your life. In order to "get right" with God in their thinking they immediately dismissed their foreign wives and their children. This action was not ordered by God but that is the description of what they thought was right. This then

is not the prescriptions that we should dismiss our unbelieving spouses! Can you think of other biblical descriptions that are not prescriptions for us to follow? How do we know the difference between description and prescription when reading the bible?

8. Why do you think it was necessary for the Israelites to take such drastic measures to deal with their sin?
9. It was beneficial for the Israelites to confess as an entire group because this would allow them to be accountable to one another.
 - A. Under what circumstances do you think it is wise to repent of sin in the presence of other believers?
 - B. Conversely what circumstance would it be unwise for a similar confession of sin?
10. Share your major takeaways from the Lesson/Sermon.

(9:1–10:44) **Introduction:** seldom in history has revival been needed as much as it is today. This is a day of terrible immorality and wickedness, lawlessness and violence, dishonesty and deceit. By the hundreds and thousands people are feeling restless, empty, purposeless, lonely, discouraged, and depressed. Others feel hopeless to escape the distress and anguish they feel within their souls. Millions desperately need to be revived, aroused to experience life in all its fullness—life that can be found only in Jesus Christ.

Even within the church many are found to be caught up in the possessions and pleasures of the world and in its corrupt, immoral, and wicked behavior. If the church has ever needed revival, it is today.

About five months after Ezra and the returnees arrived in Jerusalem (7:9; 10:9), Ezra was confronted with a crisis that threatened the very life of the small community of exiles who had returned. The crisis involved terrible sin that had seeped into the lives of the returned exiles. Many of them were engaging in the detestable, evil behavior of their unbelieving neighbors. This is, *Ezra's Confrontation with the People Over Their Evil Associations: A Picture of Genuine Revival*, 9:1–10:44.

1. The need for revival: the people were participating in the worldly, sinful behavior of unbelievers—even marrying unbelievers (9:1-2).

2. The deep concern and prayer of Ezra for revival: the people desperately needed to confess (9:3-15).

3. The experience of revival: the people confessed and repented (10:1-44).

1. (9:1-2) Revival, Need for—Worldliness, Example of—Marriage, Duty—Associations, Evil, Example of—Spiritual Separation, Failure—Separation, Spiritual, Failure in—Walk, Sinful, Example of—Life, Sinful, Example of—Believers, Sins of: after being in Jerusalem for about five months (7:9; 10:9), Ezra began to sense a deep need for revival among the people. He obviously had begun a teaching ministry among the people after they arrived, instructing them in the Word of the LORD. Apparently, a spirit of conviction struck the hearts of some, in particular the leaders. They came to Ezra confessing their sins. However, many of the people were not living lives of spiritual separation as commanded by God. They were engaging in the detestable, immoral, and wicked behavior of unbelievers, following the evil lifestyle and false worship of their neighbors. Note the neighbors listed: the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites (v.1).

Not only were these Jews committing immorality and wickedness, but some were also intermarrying with unbelievers. This was in direct violation of God's Holy commandments:

“For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God: Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice; And thou

take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods” (Ex.34:14-16; also see De.7:1-6; 20:10-18).

Even more tragic, some of the men had divorced their Jewish wives in order to marry unbelieving women. Although this is not mentioned by Ezra in the present Scripture, the prophet Malachi preached against this sin that seemed to be common among the returning exiles:

“Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god. The LORD will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the LORD of hosts. And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth *it* with good will at your hand. Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet *is* she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for *one* covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously” (Mal.2:11-16).

God’s law did allow Jews to marry foreigners if the foreigners turned away from their false worship and wicked lifestyles and turned to the LORD. The book of *Ruth* shows this. However, the Jews were never allowed to marry any of the native Canaanites because of the depth of sin to which they had fallen. Even before the Israelites had arrived in the promised land of Canaan, the Canaanites had become so steeped in sin that they were beyond repentance. They were doomed to eternal judgment (see *DEEPER STUDY #1—Jos.11:20* for more discussion). In the present situation, leaders—both civil and religious—were the worst offenders. They were the most unfaithful, sinful, and worldly. By marrying unbelievers and engaging in the detestable practices of immorality and wickedness, God’s people had polluted or corrupted themselves. Believers were mingling, associating with unbelievers and corrupting “the holy seed,” the holy race being created by God. Note how verse two drives home this point.

Thought 1. Believers are to be spiritually separated from the wicked and evil of this earth. We are not to participate in the sinful, worldly behavior of unbelievers. Immorality, gossip, hatred, greed, covetousness, lying, stealing, cheating, and all other sinful behaviors are not to be a part of our lifestyle. If neighbors, fellow workers, classmates or relatives engage in such wicked behavior, we must not follow in their steps. We are to take a strong stand for righteousness, morality, and peace. When dealing with immorality and unrighteousness, we are to live lives of spiritual separation, having nothing to do with wicked behavior. God does not expect us to become extremists, to isolate ourselves from fellow workers, classmates, and neighbors. In fact, He commands us to be witnesses to the lost of the world and to disciple them, which involves associating with them. But God’s instructions are clear: we must not fellowship and socialize with the wicked of this earth. If we socialize with them, eventually they will seduce and influence us to participate in their wicked and immoral behavior. Note what Holy Scripture says:

“And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares” (Lu.21:34).

2. (9:3-15) Confession, Prayer of, Example—Prayer, Example—Revival, Concern for, Example—Sin, Confession of, Example—Church, Revival: Ezra’s heart was immediately gripped by a deep concern for the people. Thus he did the only thing he could: he went to the LORD in prayer, confessing the people’s sins and asking the LORD to send revival among them. In describing the scene, Scripture paints the picture of a man with a tender heart, a man who sincerely trusted the LORD and cared deeply for his people.

1. When Ezra heard about the sins of the people, he was gripped by a heavy spirit of mourning (vv.3-4). Scripture actually says that he was utterly *appalled*, shocked, horrified at the terrible sins of the people. This was indicated by his tearing his clothing and pulling his hair and beard. It was the custom of that day to express one's grief in this way. Apparently Ezra had gone to the temple to express his grief and to seek the LORD. Naturally, the worshippers wanted to know what was troubling him so deeply. Soon all the faithful believers, those who feared God and trembled at His Word, joined Ezra in mourning over the sins of the people. In utter dismay, Ezra sat there in the temple until the evening sacrifice.

2. When it was time for the evening sacrifice, Ezra offered up his prayer of confession (vv.5-15). He rose from where he had been sitting, fell to his knees, then lifted up his hands to the LORD in prayer and intercession for the people. In his prayer, Ezra made four confessions:

a. Ezra confessed the shame of both his and the people's *past sins* (vv.6-7). He identified himself with the people, confessing that both he and the people were guilty before the LORD.

⇒ He confessed that their sins had been piled up higher than their heads, which meant that they were drowning in the deep waters of sin (v.6).

⇒ He confessed that their sins and guilt had reached higher than the heavens themselves, which meant that they were provoking God and threatening to arouse His judgment (v.6).

⇒ He confessed that the people had tragically continued in sin down through the generations, which had brought God's judgment upon the kings, priests, and people. God's judgment could be seen in the death, captivity, humiliation, and loss of wealth the people had suffered, even up until that very day.

b. Ezra then confessed God's goodness, which He had showered upon the present generation (vv.8-9). Scripture actually says that the present generation had been given a very special grace by God, at least for a little while, a brief moment (v.8). Ezra spelled out seven facts that proved God's goodness was being showered upon the returnees:

⇒ First, the LORD had left the Jews a remnant, a small body of believers who had escaped the enslavement of Babylon. But Ezra knew that the *remnant* must live obedient and righteous lives if God was going to fulfill His promises to them. If the remnant had not been faithful to the LORD, God's plan of redemption would have never been carried out through the Jews. Neither the Savior nor the Word of God would have come through them. His promises would not have been fulfilled. Thus the remnant must live righteous and obedient lives before the LORD.

⇒ Second, God had given them a *nail* in His holy place or sanctuary. The *nail* signifies a strong, binding, and secure place in the sanctuary of God's presence. As long as they followed the LORD, obeying His holy commandments, they had security in Him.

⇒ Third, God had given light to their eyes. That is, He had enlightened their eyes so they could see and have hope in the future. He had revived their spirits.

⇒ Fourth, He had delivered them from the bondage of captivity, giving them relief and freedom.

⇒ Fifth, He had not forsaken them, not deserted them in their bondage (v.9). Although they were still subject to the Persian Empire, they had been set free to return to their own homeland where they could worship God freely. The LORD had not deserted them, not completely nor permanently.

⇒ Sixth, the LORD had given them revival and the opportunity of a new life (v.9). They had been allowed to return in order to rebuild their nation and their temple.

⇒ Seventh, the LORD had given them a wall of protection in the promised land, the protection of His very own power.

c. Ezra confessed the sins of the people. Their sins had, in reality, placed them back in bondage to the world and its lifestyle of wickedness (vv.10-12). Ezra was so shaken by the depth and gravity of the evil that he was

almost speechless. “What can we say after this?” he asked the LORD. The present generation was guilty of four sins in particular:

- ⇒ They had forsaken God’s commandments (vv.10-11). They were engaging in the corrupt, detestable, and impure behavior of their unbelieving neighbors.
- ⇒ They had intermarried with unbelievers (v.12).
- ⇒ They had coveted evil associations, the friendship and social life of unbelievers.
- ⇒ They had jeopardized their and their children’s future by rejecting the promises of God to make them strong and to give the promised land to their children as an eternal inheritance (v.12).

d. Ezra confessed their unworthiness, confessed that they were undeserving of any blessing of God (vv.13-15). He pointed out six facts:

- ⇒ They were guilty of terrible wickedness.
- ⇒ God in His goodness had punished them far less than they deserved.
- ⇒ They were breaking God’s commandments, in particular by mixing with unbelievers and engaging in appallingly wicked behavior (v.14).
- ⇒ They deserved God’s judgment because of their unworthiness.
- ⇒ They were clearly and totally short of God’s righteousness (v.15).
- ⇒ They were only a small remnant, but once again the remnant was guilty before God. In fact, they were so sinful and guilty that they were not worthy to stand in God’s presence (v.15).

Thought 1. Confession is an absolute essential to receive forgiveness of sin. Therefore, when we sin, we must confess before God. Failure to confess means that we bear the guilt of sin ourselves. Picture a person who breaks a law of the land. For his violation, he must pay the stated or agreed upon penalty for his violation or else be forgiven for his disobedience. Likewise, when we break the law of God, we must either seek His forgiveness or else bear the guilt and punishment ourselves. And God is unwavering about the punishment! Thus, confessing our sins is the key to escaping God’s coming judgment. God’s Holy Word declares this undeniable truth:

“For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God [forgiveness] *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Ro.6:23).

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn.1:9).

“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (2 Chr.7:14).

“Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives” (Ezr.10:11).

3. (10:1-44) Confession, Example of—Repentance, Example of—Revival, Example of—Returned Exiles, Revival Experienced—Spiritual Separation, Example of—Evil Associations, Repentance of: amazingly, revival broke out among the people, a genuine revival of confession and repentance of sin. All this was due to one man, to Ezra’s broken heart and prayer. Scripture records the stunning, wonderful event:

1. On the very day of Ezra’s mourning, the people responded (10:1-4). The scene of their godly leader and teacher prostrate upon the ground in front of the temple, confessing and weeping in deep agony, attracted attention. Other worshippers as well as all who passed nearby the temple soon gathered to join Ezra in seeking the LORD. Everyone wept loudly and bitterly. At some point, a man named Shecaniah got up and stepped in as the leader for the people. Note this fact: by taking the leadership, he was taking a stand against his own father.

His father Jehiel was guilty of having married an unbeliever (v.26). As the people's spokesman, Shecaniah offered great hope to the people:

⇒ First, he confessed their sin and unfaithfulness, their guilt for marrying unbelievers and engaging in their wicked lifestyle (v.2).

⇒ Second, he declared there was still hope in God (v.2). Despite their sinfulness, God would have mercy upon them and renew their hope for rebuilding the nation and restoring true worship.

⇒ Third, he suggested they repent and make a covenant with God to divorce the unbelieving wives, sending them away with the children (v.3). As drastic as this action seemed, it was necessary for a crisis had been created. The Jews were only a remnant of the nation, quite small in number, which meant that their survival was shaky at best. The curse of sin and disobedience was threatening to destroy them. Without God, their nation and testimony to the only true God would be erased forever. Knowing this, Shecaniah felt deeply that the people needed to repent and make a renewed covenant, a renewed commitment to obey God's law. In Shecaniah's mind, this appeared to be the only way to handle the problem, for they must be careful to act only as the law dictated. Exactly what law he was referring to is not known, but perhaps it was the law against intermarriage (De.7:3; also see the laws dealing with divorce: De.24:1-4; 22:19, 29; Isa. 50:1; Je.3:8).

The act of divorcing unbelievers may seem drastic and harsh to people today, but the returnees were concerned with the sinfulness of intermarriage. They sensed a deep need that this and all other sin must be put out of their lives. Although believers today are not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers, the New Testament teaches that once people are married, they are to stay married if at all possible (1 Cor. 7:12-16).

⇒ Fourth, he encouraged Ezra to arise and take charge of the crisis (v.4). Being their leader and teacher, it was Ezra's responsibility. No doubt with firmness in his voice, Shecaniah assured Ezra that they would follow and support him (v.4).

2. Ezra immediately arose and took decisive action, and the people responded to his strong leadership (vv.5-8). He placed the people under oath, arousing them to swear they would do exactly as had been suggested (v.5). After kindling the fire under the people, Ezra left the front of the temple and sought privacy in the room of Jehohanan, the grandson of the High Priest Eliashib (Ne.12:10-11, 23; 13:28). Continuing to seek the face of the LORD over the sins of the people, Ezra fasted—neither eating nor drinking.

As quickly as possible, a proclamation was prepared and sent throughout Judah, calling all the returned exiles to assemble in Jerusalem (v.7). And note, attendance was compulsory (v.8). Failure to appear within three days had severe consequences: the person would lose all of his property and be exiled from the nation. The money from the sale of his property would go to the temple (Le.27:28-29). Note that even before the Jews returned to Judah, Artaxerxes had given Ezra the authority to take this action, if necessary (7:26).

3. When the people arrived in Jerusalem, they responded to the call for repentance and spiritual separation (vv.9-12). So far as is known, all the people assembled within the three days allowed (v.9). The date was the 20th day of the ninth month, which was December according to modern-day calendars. Sitting in the square before the house of God, the people were trembling both because of conviction over their sins and because it was raining. Ezra was preaching, declaring that they had sinned by mixing with unbelievers and intermarrying with them (vv.10-11). He challenged the people to confess their sins to the LORD and repent, to separate from the worldly unbelievers around them and divorce their unbelieving spouses.

In response, the people gave a resounding promise to do exactly what Ezra commanded (v.12). With a loud voice they shouted out in unison that he was correct. They must do what he said.

4. A number of leaders representing the people soon made a reasonable and practical suggestion: that the public meeting be dismissed and the guilty parties be dealt with on a local basis (v.13). The reasons were obvious: the

rains were heavy, and there were so many people involved in the sinful affair that the matter could not be taken care of in a day or two. For these reasons, it was suggested that local officials from each town act on behalf of the nation (v.14). By doing this, each case could be handled by appointment, investigated, and the guilty persons identified.

Realizing the wisdom of the suggestion, the majority immediately approved the idea. Only four men dissented and opposed it (v.15).

5. Following the proposal that had been laid out, the local officials began to counsel and investigate the cases of intermarriage among the Jews (vv.16-17). Wisely, Ezra appointed leaders of each family or clan to judge the cases of his own family. This meant there was a close bond between the judge and the guilty parties. In all likelihood, both counseling and encouraging unbelievers to become converts to the only true God were part of the investigation. Being a family affair also meant that each case would be handled with more compassion and understanding. More pressure would be placed upon the family head to do all he could to lead the unbelievers to the LORD and the guilty Jews to true repentance. The family judges began their investigations on the first day of the tenth month and completed the task on the first day of the first month. Altogether it took three months to complete the task.

6. The people kept their oath. They divorced their foreign, unbelieving wives who refused to accept the LORD. They then offered sacrifices to the LORD, seeking His forgiveness (10:18-44). This included the guilty priests and Levites (vv.18-24) as well as the Israelite laymen (vv.25-44). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* says this:

“Each case was judged individually so that justice would be done. By this action the community was not saying that divorce was good. It was a matter of following God’s Law about the need for religious purity in the nation. (Ex.34:11-16; De.7:-14). Ezra wrote nothing about what happened to these foreign women or their children. Presumably they returned to their pagan countries.”

In *The New American Commentary*, Mervin Breneman discusses the crisis of intermarriage that the Jews were facing. His discussion is well worth quoting in its entirety:

Ezra knew that marriage was instituted by God and considered a permanent and exclusive relationship (Gen 2:24, quoted in Matt 19:5; Eph 5:31). If Malachi preached about Ezra’s time or just before, Ezra was surely familiar with his teaching on divorce in 2:16 (“‘I hate divorce,’ says the Lord God of Israel”). Much of biblical ethics has to do with the sanctity of the marriage relationship. In fact, God even uses marriage to illustrate his own relationship to his people (Hos 1-3; Eph 5). Since the family is the basis of society, any offense against the family is an offense against God.

The moral dilemma Ezra faced, however, was caused by the pagan influence these foreign women would have on the children of these mixed marriages and on the newly reestablished community of faith. Ezra knew the story of Solomon and his foreign wives and the devastating effect this had had on Israel (1 Kgs 11:1-11; cf. Neh 13:26-27). The family and the convictions of the whole religious community were at stake. Ezra’s action was drastic, but he chose the path most likely to protect the covenant community from pagan syncretism [the combining of different forms of belief or practice] (cf. Gal 3:23; 1 Cor 5). There is wisdom in Homgren’s statement: “Sometimes preservation of a way of life dictates a policy which disappoints the democratic, ecumenical spirit.”

Nevertheless, if Ezra emphasized God’s law, how could he support the decision to divorce these foreign wives? Deuteronomy 24:1-14 indicates that sometimes divorce was permitted in the Old Testament (also 22:19, 29; Isa 50:1; Jer 3:8). Also, the situation in Ezra was different from that envisioned elsewhere, for in Ezra pagan wives were involved. These marriages were wrong from the outset. Malachi’s statement that God hates divorce, although true in an absolute sense, is given in response to Jews who had divorced their Jewish wives in order to

take foreign women. In this historically unique case, Ezra and the Jewish leaders considered that the importance of maintaining the purity of the religious community superceded that of these marital relationships.

In the New Testament, Jesus plainly teaches that divorce is not God’s will: “What God has joined together, let no man separate” (Matt 19:6). Especially in our times when irresponsibility and selfishness are often renamed “individual freedom,” the sanctity and permanence of marriage must be emphasized. Yet Matt 19:9 and 1 Cor 7:11,15 recognize that in certain cases divorce will occur. Churches have differed concerning the toleration of divorce and remarriage. The Catholic Church has consistently prohibited it, as have some Protestant groups. It has become an ever-increasing moral issue. The teaching of the Old and New Testaments has led many Christians to accept that in some circumstances divorce may be accepted as a tragic last resort when the marriage has completely broken down and no possibility of restoration exists. These chapters in Ezra, however, are descriptive, not prescriptive. They cannot be taken as authorization for divorcing an unbelieving spouse. In 1 Cor 7:12-16 Paul exhorts one who has an unbelieving partner not to divorce: but if the unbelieving partner leaves, the believer is “not bound in such circumstances.” Most Christian leaders agree that each case must be studied carefully in light of Scripture and in light of its own particular situation.

This episode shows the danger of moral and spiritual apathy and the importance of maintaining the identity of the believing community in a pagan world. The commission of Artaxerxes to Ezra was to develop Judaism as a religious community. According to Malachi, some men already had divorced their Jewish wives to take foreign women, and the process of assimilation had already begun (Mal 2:10-17; 3:13-15). So the threat to the community was real. It also shows the seriousness with which the Bible treats marriage between believers and unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14-18). Furthermore, this episode also shows the wisdom of Ezra’s leadership. As vital as his leadership was, he did not force his decision on the people. Rather, he influenced the leaders and people, relying on the power of God’s Word and Spirit; and the decision was made by the community of believers. We can learn from his teaching, his patience, and his example. This shows how strong convictions, held deeply by one leader or a minority, can influence the future of the whole community’s life and thought. Just as in Ezra’s time, the believing community today often faces crises that demand strong leadership and decisive, united community action.

Thought 1. Revival can come only through *confession* and *repentance* of sin. A person who continues in his sin will not experience revival. Why? Because the heart cannot be truly revived, put at peace and made restful, if it is alienated from God. And sin alienates, separates the human heart from God. The heart is restless—dissatisfied, unfulfilled, and somewhat insecure—until it finds its rest in God. True revival of the human heart can only come if we confess and repent of our sins.

So it is with the church. The church will be truly revived, awakened to righteousness, only when its members confess and repent of their sins. But when they do confess and repent, the most wonderful experience of revival will flood the church. Revival brings a sense of peace, rest, and fulfillment to the heart of the church. In addition, the church is aroused with a renewed spirit of purpose and mission, bearing a far stronger testimony for the LORD. But this fact must be kept in mind: to experience revival we must confess and repent of our sins.

1) Listen to what God’s Holy Word says about repentance and confession:

“Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted” (Mt.5:4).

“I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance” (Lu.15:7).

2) Listen to what God’s Holy Word says about revival and renewal of the human heart:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service*. And be not conformed to

this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Ro.12:1-2).

Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary - The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.