

Ezra10:1-17 “Repentance”

(Introduction)

- We're coming to the end of our expository preaching series of “From Survival to Revival” through the book of Ezra. Today's theme is “repentance” from Ezra chapter 10. To many people, the word “repentance” sounds negative, even among Christians. We easily misunderstand what repentance actually is. It usually is associated with feelings of regret, guilt, and our unworthiness as sinners.
- However, the Bible tells us that repentance is the change of our heart. This means the change in our lifestyle, values, and even the purpose of our life. Repentance is very important and actually has an extremely positive meaning. Repentance includes the sorrow from admitting our sins, but ultimately, repentance is changing our life in a positive and proactive manner.
- Repentance of our sin makes our life new. It is also the essential key to the renewal and revival of the community of Grace City Church Tokyo. We approach our 10 year anniversary of Grace City Church in May 31st, in the day of The Pentecost. We have survived 10 years in Tokyo, but we are truly seeking the complete renewal of Tokyo by The Gospel. Our goal is to reach out to people of Tokyo with The Gospel of Jesus Christ, leading us to the repentance of our sins, so we may see a new Shalom in Tokyo.
- So, today, I would like to see how repentance happened in Ezra chapter 10. In the days of Ezra, the Temple of the Lord had been rebuilt, as it was the center of the Israelites' society. And also, the city of Jerusalem has been rebuilt. They were self-satisfied inside and outside. But the Israelites needed a renewal of their hearts; a revival and repentance.

(Ezra10:1-17 ESV)

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. **4** Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it.” **5** Then Ezra arose and made the leading priests and Levites and all Israel take an oath that they would do as had been said. So they took the oath. **6** Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the chamber of Jehohanan 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. **7** And a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem, **8** 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. **9** Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within the three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth 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. **10** And Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, “You have broken faith and married foreign women, and so increased the guilt of Israel. **11** 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.” **12** Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, “It is so; we must do as you have said. **13** 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 day or for two, for we have greatly transgressed in this matter. **14** 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.” **15** Only Jonathan the

son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite supported them. 16 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; 17 and by the first day of the first month they had come to the end of all the men who had married foreign women.

This is the word of living God. Amen

- I will give you 3 points from this chapter:

1st, repentance comes from the change of our heart.

Real repentance does not come from changing our outside behavior.

2nd, repentance is difficult.

We hesitate or even escape from true repentance. How can we have victory over these temptations?

3rd, repentance is not only the change on the inside of our hearts.

Repentance will change our behavior and give us new life in Christ.

Therefore, repentance is: the changing of our hearts, it is not an easy thing to accomplish, but it gives us new life.

1: the Changing of our hearts

- Ezra was a biblical scholar and priest. He taught the Word of God and God's will to the Israelites. Many Israelites realized that they are not following God. Therefore, Ezra, the Israelites' leaders, and their people cried out in repentance.

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.

- Why did they weep, pray and confess? The reason was because of the intermarriage with other tribes. Why was this a big deal? The Jewish people were forbidden to marry other tribes in the Old Testament. This commandment was not based on ethnicism or racism.

Rahab, who was a Canaanite prostitute, and Ruth, the Moabite, were married to Jewish men.

- According to Deuteronomy, it was so they wouldn't lose their faith in God. Married couples were very few in society and their unity in faith and lifestyle was so important. Not only that, Israel had the role to proclaim God to the world and carry out His blessing and Shalom. Therefore, any acts against God's trust (including intermarriage with non-believers) had been strongly condemned.

- But, I want you to focus on one thing. Ezra, who is the priest and Bible scholar, did not order anything to the Israelites. Ezra simply taught the Bible and prayed to God. Men, women, and children, followed him because of that. They also started praying with weeping. They were looking for guidance as to what should they do. It is the chain reaction by the Holy Spirit. Verse 2-4 said, **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[a] and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to the Law. 4 Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it."**

- After that, Ezra went to the other chamber in the Temple. **Ezra then withdrew from before the house of God and went to the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib, where he spent the night,[b] neither eating bread nor drinking water, for he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles.(Verse 6).** Ezra fasted and prayed without ceasing. Repentance begins with the word of God and is lead to a renewal of our hearts. Repentance is admitting to your sins and sorrow, turn back to God, and throw away your sins. It is deeply connected to prayer.

Through prayer, you will get to know His holiness and love. Your new life will become real through

prayer.

- Shecaniah the son of Jehiel(Jehiel was in the list of man who intermarried in verse 26) said, **even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. Therefore let us make a covenant with our God(verse 2-3)** . Shecaniah believed in God's grace, forgiveness, and mercy. Shecaniah believed in The Good News. They did not repent their sins because they were afraid of God or feared His judgement.
- So, we shouldn't repent our sins simply because it is against the holiness of God or the fear of His judgement. True repentance comes from God's forgiveness and grace so our heart is moved by Him with joy. Let us pray to God for the changing of our hearts so that we may have hope in His unfailing love.

2. Repentance is difficult (hesitation and escape)

- So, repented Israelites decided to divorce with foreign wives and forced out their children. It is surprising action. Verse 10 to 11 says. **10 And Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have broken faith and married foreign women, and so increased the guilt of Israel. 11 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."**
- Grace City, are you able to listen to this word without feeling uncomfortable? They draw to the conclusion that they should leave their foreign wives. Divorce is obviously a way to bring pain and sorrow. From verse 18, one hundred-eleven men were married to their foreign wives.
- Some priests and Levites married with foreign wives. There was a severe situation. Also they made children. Other leaders are disagreed about Ezra's decision verse 15 said, **Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite supported them.**
- Repentance might bring us hardship. You cannot escape from the pain of your heart and hesitations of repentance. Repentance is not easy. We tend to make excuses to escape from repenting, even though it would bring revival, which leads to life.
- For example, some people might say that the Bible's teaching is too strict to compare with modern society. The Bible forbids lying, but many people tell "white lies". Also, your pride and eyes towards others may prevent you from the repentance. Everyone is looking for acceptance from everyone. We justify ourselves because we would like to have a good reputation.
- Also, we might think that if we perform good deeds may redeem our sins (for example, serving the church or give offerings to church). We might compare ourselves to others to minimize our sins. If you hesitate to repent or cover up your sins, you have to go to the feet of Jesus.
- In the time of Ezra, all men who married foreign woman had to divorce. But it does not say that Christians who married with non-Christians must divorce when they repent their sins. This is basic principle of biblical hermeneutics. One historical incident is not always applicable to other times in history.
- For example, in the book of Acts in the New testament, many Christians sold their belongings and shared with others. This is great way to show God's love and justice. Also, it is great example of how the Gospel of Christ created this community of love, but this does not mean all Christians have to sell all belongings to share to others.
- the teaching of the Old Testament must understand with the Light of the Gospel of Christ. Divorced wives and their children dealt with sacrifice and pain. Jesus took these to the cross. Therefore, when

we repent our sins, we have to remember the cross of Jesus. The debt of our sins is completely unpayable, but Jesus paid it all at the cross.

- Have you ever escaped or hesitated from repenting, even though you have sinned in front of God? Let us remember Jesus's suffering and pain on the cross which is for your sins. Sin has already been paid off by Jesus. Therefore, repent your sins without hesitation.

3. Change of how we live.

- Repentance will be motivated by the cross of Jesus and the transformation of our hearts through God's Word. Many people want to renew their life. The Bible clearly tells us that our life will be renewed through repentance. This is good news!

• British born Canadian theologian J.I. Packer clearly teaches us what repentance is. It is from his book "Concise Theology" p.162

Repentance means changing one's mind so that one's views, values, goals, and ways are changed and one's whole life is lived differently. The change is radical, both inwardly and outwardly; mind and judgement, will and affections, behavior and life-style, motives and purposes, are all involved. Repenting means starting to live an new life.

- When you take a look at Ezra Chapter 10, their repentance came from the changing of their hearts. It leads to prayer. Then, it leads to action. They took a step to make a change. Also, they work together as a community. This transformation started from their hearts to change their lives. It was a process. It was not like magic.
- First of all, they gathered together and listened to God's will even though they were in freezing, cold rain. They selected officials and searched who committed this sin. They brought it up at the appointed time with elders and leaders of the city.
- From this, the repentance of individuals and repentance in the community were inseparable. We need to listen to His word individually then apply to our lives. Also, we need the support of community for the repentance of our sins. Through this, it will lead us to true repentance.
- We tend to project our own views into faith and religion. If you think faith is personal, and only a private thing, you will not experience the change which you expect. You cannot exercise faith by yourself. We have a blindside to our faith. We are so unaware of our own sins.
- When I started church planting with Grace City Church Tokyo, I received an assessment. Five people who is my senior, friends, co-worker evaluate my traits and personality, strongness and weakness. The result was shocking to me because I thought I was an honest person who keeps his promises. But they didn't see me this way. I have sins which I couldn't see.
- Therefore, repentance is not only the first step of our faith. It is a first step of our whole life. Repentance is to experience His Love and Holiness. Repentance means: walk with God. It is the process of Christ's Gospel which is revealed in our lives.
- You cannot repent your sins on your own. Please receive Christ's Love and forgiveness through His Good News.

Let us boldly repent our sins!