

BUILD-A-BELIEVER WORKSHOPS

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People say to me, "How do you build a church?" You don't build a church, you build a believer. As a result, the church will build itself. (John MacArthur).

Ezra

Chapter Nine

"God's Got You Pegged"

Introduction

We've been praying for revival in Kings County since our Church was a small home fellowship. I'm sure every other Bible-teaching Church has also asked God to send a revival to our county and its cities.

Did you ever think that maybe God has sent a revival or two... but we didn't recognize it? It sounds odd – until you read about revival in Ezra's time. In verse eight, Ezra said that God had given them **a measure of revival**. In the KJV it reads, **a little reviving**. Ezra seems to be indicating that God can measure out to you a little bit of revival to see what you will do with it.

In the case of the Jews who had returned from Babylon to Jerusalem, God measured out a little revival. They had rebuilt their Temple and reestablished worship. They had also, however, disobeyed God's law by intermingling with and intermarrying with **the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites**. The little revival God had measured out to them was faltering because they had not acted upon it with their whole hearts.

We wouldn't want that to happen to us! We would want to recognize the little measure of revival God has sent, then cherish it and act upon it.

We'll therefore organize our thoughts around two questions: #1 What Would You Do With A Little Reviving?, and #2 What Would You Do For A Larger Revival?

#1 What Would You Do
With A Little Reviving?
(v1-2 & 8-9)

Revival is usually thought of as an all-or-nothing, radical transformation. We're going to learn from Ezra that God can grant it in small portions to see what you will do with it. In the case at hand, some of the Jews were trying to enjoy reviving without remaining separated from the world around them. They wanted it both ways.

Ezra 9:1 When these things were done, the leaders came to me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

Ezra 9:2 For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass."

Intermarriage was forbidden by the Law of Moses for a good reason. Intimate contact with foreign wives always led to adopting their false religious practices. It led to immorality and idolatry.

Some of the leaders ratted-out other leaders and rulers who had married foreign wives or condoned those marriages for their sons. Why now? Why hadn't they acted previously?

- being changed to bring change -

Ezra had been sent by God to teach them God's Law. He had been among them about 5-months. Apparently he had gotten as far as Deuteronomy 7:1-6, which reads,

Deuteronomy 7:1 "When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, Deuteronomy 7:2 and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them.

Deuteronomy 7:3 Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son.

Deuteronomy 7:4 For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly.

Deuteronomy 7:5 But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their *sacred* pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire.

Deuteronomy 7:6 “For you *are* a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.

What is cool about this is that the people heard God’s Word, received it, and acted upon it. It teaches us an important first principle of revival. God grants a little measure of revival and then fuels its fire with His Word. If you will simply take the Word at its face value and apply it, your revival will continue to burn.

Drop down into verses eight and nine. Even though they are a part of Ezra’s prayer, these verses look back upon the little measure of revival God had granted. They described it using at least four images.

The first image is that of a **remnant**:

Ezra 9:8 And now for a little while grace has been *shown* from the LORD our God, to leave us a **remnant** to escape...

There is a long passage in First Kings (chapter eleven) in which a garment is torn into twelve remnants – each one symbolizing one of the twelve tribes of Israel. The idea there and here is that even though the garment might be soiled or torn, there is always a remnant of it being kept safe. Israel was the garment; they had been soiled by sin, then torn apart by the Babylonians. God had granted a little measure of revival by sending to Jerusalem a small remnant of His people that He had kept safe.

The second image is that of a **peg**:

Ezra 9:8 And now for a little while grace has been *shown* from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a **peg** in His holy place...

Some of your Bible’s may translate the word as **nail** instead of **peg**. It seems to be describing a tent-peg, or a stake. A tent-peg holds down the tent and keeps it from being blown-away in the wind. The returnees were like a tent-peg, sent back to anchor the nation.

The third image is **illumination**:

Ezra 9:8 And now for a little while grace has been *shown* from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may **enlighten our eyes** and give us a measure of revival in our bondage.

It's as if they had been dying, but God granted them new life. Instead of their eyes going dark, they were shining bright from the life within them. It's almost like a resurrection.

The fourth image, in verse nine, is that of a **wall**:

Ezra 9:9 For we *were* slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem.

A **wall** speaks of protection. God had been working through His mighty providence to give them favor with the kings of Persia. He had secured their release and return.

We can put all this together. If you are a Christian, your eyes are **enlightened** by the life of God within you. You are part of a small **remnant** of believers living in a hostile world.

Out in that world, the Lord is a **wall** of protection for you. Nothing can occur that is outside of His allowing it for your good and His glory. Thus you are to see yourself as a tent-**peg**. You have been driven into the ground of your circumstances in order to uphold the Gospel. Your faith is anchored deep in the ground of God's Word for all to see. God's got you pegged – right where He wants you!

God is fully capable of granting a more traditional revival – one in which many hundreds or thousands of people come to Jesus. In the mean time, every day is a day in which He has measured out a little reviving. As you realize you've been and are being revived, and as you simply apply God's Word, you will be revived more-and-more. Your life, and its testimony, will be the revival 'tent' others enter and hear the good news about Jesus.

Or you can try to mix God's reviving with some of the things forbidden by His Word. There is no best of both worlds – only the worst of this world contaminating your relationship with God.

The Word Ezra taught brought the people to an understanding they were disobeying God in their revival. What would they do? What should you do?

#2 What Would You Do For A Larger Revival? (v3-7 & 10-15)

Ezra heard the report and immediately had this reaction – in verse three:

Ezra 9:3 So when I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished.

Ezra acted as you would if someone had died. It was a fitting response – since God had granted them life.

When you return to the things God has delivered you from, it's as if you are choosing death over life. It's a kind of spiritual suicide. You don't lose your salvation; but you are acting as if you'd rather be dead again in your sins. It should cause astonishment.

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Ezra 9:4 Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.

Remember: Ezra had been teaching through the Scriptures. He may have been in the place where he daily taught the people. Those who came were described as those **who trembled at the words of... God**. (More about that later). Instead of the usually verse-by-verse teaching, Ezra went into a funeral posture!

Ezra 9:5 At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God.

Ezra hadn't started praying yet. He just sat there. Sometimes the best thing to do is nothing – until you hear from the Lord.

He went into an unplanned *fasting*. He was wrestling with spiritual issues and had no time to eat. Finally, he does begin to pray.

Ezra 9:6 And I said: "O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than *our* heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens.

Ezra 9:7 Since the days of our fathers to this day we *have been* very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings, *and* our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, as *it is* this day.

Ezra prayed in the first person – as if he was just as guilty. It highlights the spiritual truth that we are all connected, and that what each of us does affects all the others.

When I want to have something in the world, that God has forbidden in His Word, it doesn't just affect me. It affects every one I am in fellowship with – whether they know about it or not! It's worse when I flaunt it as a 'liberty' that I am allowed.

Drop to verse ten:

Ezra 9:10 And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments,

Ezra 9:11 which You commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, 'The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their impurity.

Ezra 9:12 Now therefore, do not give your daughters as wives for their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons; and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave *it* as an inheritance to your children forever.'

Every Christian ought to watch *Pinocchio* at least once a year. Not the whole movie – but the Pleasure Island sequence. It portrays the world as a place of forbidden but intoxicating pleasures. You can get your fill – but there is a price to pay. In the end, Lampwig is turned into a donkey and enslaved to work in the mines. Pinocchio barely escapes – but has the features of a donkey for a while.

We must portray to, and then example for, others that living for Christ is infinitely preferable to anything the world has to offer.

Ezra 9:13 And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our

great guilt, since You our God have punished us less than our iniquities *deserve*, and have given us *such* deliverance as this,
Ezra 9:14 should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people *committing* these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed *us*, so that *there would be* no remnant or survivor?
Ezra 9:15 O LORD God of Israel, You *are* righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as *it is* this day. Here we *are* before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before You because of this!”

Israel had been taken captive to Babylon for committing these very same sins. You’d think they would have learned the lesson.

We must never underestimate the power of our flesh. It too often happens that Christians return to their old habits, thinking they can handle them now that they are so much stronger and mature. Hey, if I was so mature, *I wouldn’t need to return to my old habits!*

What is it Ezra did that we should do? Well, he fasted and prayed. Let’s examine those again:

1. He fasted; but it wasn’t a big fast, or anything he even planned. I don’t want to diminish fasting; but it was more a reaction than a plan.
2. He prayed, and very sincerely. Certainly prayer is an important, even key, element to revival. You must note that his prayer was quite brief. This whole prayer can be recited in a few moments. Charles Spurgeon used to say that it was the *strength* of our prayers, not the *length* of our prayers, that was important.

As important as prayer and fasting are, something preceded them. It was the trembling at God’s Word we discussed.

God’s Word should always cause you to tremble. There are various reasons why you tremble. Two reasons come immediately to mind:

1. The first is fear. I can tremble when I am extremely afraid. There are prohibitions in God’s Word; there are forbidden behaviors. There are “Thou shalt not...” passages. When I am disobedient; when I am sinning; those parts of God’s Word ought to cause me to tremble.

2. There is a second reason I can tremble. It is from love. Being in the presence of the one I love; touching the one I live; causes trembling.

For example:

1. If I go to my mailbox, and see a letter from the IRS audit department... I'm going to tremble with fear!
2. If I go to that same mailbox, and see that Pam has sent me a love-note, I'm going to tremble with excitement!

There's a successful credit card ad campaign that asks, "What's in your wallet?"

We could adapt that and ask, "What's in your Bible?" When you read God's Word, are you full of tremblings with fear, because you are too much in the world? Then separate yourself! Why commit spiritual suicide with the things God delivered you from?

When you read God's Word, it should cause you to tremble at His presence, by His touch, from His love. Read it that way and you will go on being revived.

The saddest thing would be to read God's Word with no tremblings at all.

- being changed to bring change -

