

An Old Time Revival

Ezra 10:1-17

INTRODUCTION

- A. Three weeks from today begins our Gospel Meeting.
 - 1. Our speaker will do quite well.
 - 2. But, the more I've thought about it, I think we need to cancel the meeting.
 - a. Since I've been working with the church here, we've had several meetings. We've brought a preacher in, he's preached sermons, and we've thanked the preacher for a good sermon on the way out the door and gone back to our comfortable ways.
 - b. That's not at all what we need here — we need revival; we need to be challenged out of our complacency to do greater things for the Lord.
- B. This morning, I thought it would do us well to go back in time and look at An Old Time Revival.
 - 1. The Israelites desperately needed revival, for they had just returned to Jerusalem after captivity for their idolatry.
 - 2. In this morning's passage, we see what's involved in An Old Time Revival, viz., WE CONFESS, WE CONSPIRE, & WE CARRY OUT.

IN ORDER TO HAVE AN OLD TIME REVIVAL, WE CONFESS, vv. 1-2

- A. Ezra was praying, confessing, weeping, and throwing himself down. A large group gathered around him, and they, too, began to weep, v. 1.
 - 1. Sometimes prophets purposefully acted in exaggerated ways to get attention — surely Ezra does that here.
 - 2. I don't know much Hebrew, but I understand that the way the verb "throwing himself down" is worded indicates that this was a repeated action. Thus, Ezra cannot stand- upright, but he keeps prostrating himself on the ground.
 - 3. A large group of men, women, and children gather around Ezra and begin weeping, too.
 - a. Laughing is often contagious — one person starts laughing and before you know it, the whole room is laughing.
 - b. The same thing can occur with weeping, and here a large group weeps along with Ezra.
- B. Why were they weeping? They had married foreign wives, contrary to God's commands.
 - 1. Shecaniah said to Ezra, "We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us," v. 2.
 - 2. God had commanded the Israelites not to marry pagan wives:
 - a. Deut. 7:3-4.
 - b. Israelite history is full heartache because the Hebrews disregarded that divine instruction.
 - 1) Samson "fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah" (Judg. 16:4). Although we're not told that Samson married Delilah, we all know the heartache brought by that union.
 - 2) 1 Ki. 11:1-6.
 - c. Prior to the Babylonian Captivity, the Israelites were steeped in idolatry precisely because they did not destroy all the pagans as God had instructed.
- C. Here the Israelites realize their error and they confess it.
 - 1. If we want God to bless us and forgive us of our sin, we must confess our sin.
 - a. "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy" (Prov. 28:13).
 - b. "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed" (Js. 5:16).
 - c. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9).
 - 2. What sins do we need to confess before God?
 - a. What congregational sins do we need to confess before God?
 - 1) Do we need to confess that we have not sought the lost as we should have been doing?
 - 2) Do we need to confess that we have not permitted our light to shine in this community as we should have?
 - b. What personal sins do you need to confess before God?
 - 1) Are there sins in your life that have prohibited you from doing all the good you could have been doing?

- 2) Do you need to come this morning during the invitation hymn and confess sin and ask for the prayers of this congregation?

IN ORDER TO HAVE AN OLD TIME REVIVAL, WE CONSPIRE, vv. 3-15

- A. Notice the conspiring that took place in Ezra's day:
 1. Shecaniah said to Ezra, "Let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children. Let it be done according to the Law," v. 3.
 - a. Shecaniah wanted the Israelites to make a covenant with God.
 - 1) When between God and man, covenants involved a solemn oath with blessings for keeping the covenant and curses for disobeying it.
 - 2) Thus, Shecaniah said, "Let us make an oath before God that we become faithful and carry out the repentance of our sins."
 - b. Shecaniah determined what was involved in repentance: they needed to send away the women and children.
 - 1) Some might consider this cruel and unnecessary.
 - 2) But, you know that repentance involves ridding ourselves of the sin in which we are involved.
 - a) When John saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to be baptized, he said, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Mt. 3:7-8). In other words, "Don't just come here and feel sorry for what you've done, but change the way you've been acting."
 - b) "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands" (Eph. 4:28).
 - c. Shecaniah wanted his actions (and the actions of his fellow Israelites) to conform to the Law.
 - 1) If we want to repent of our sins and have a revival, we need to see that our actions conform to Scripture. Scripture — and Scripture alone — is sufficient to guide our behavior.
 - a) "Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD" (Ps. 119:1).
 - b) "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word" (Ps. 119:9).
 - 2) Will we conform our lives to the Law of God that we live lives pleasing before him?
 2. Ezra rose up and put the leading priests and Levites and all Israel under oath to do what had been suggested. And they took the oath, v. 5 — Ezra basically says, "OK, let's do it, and he put the leading priests and Levites in charge of the nation's repentance.
 3. All the people of Judah and Benjamin gathered in Jerusalem before the house of God.
 - a. Ezra arises and says, "Make confession to the Lord, do his will, and separate yourselves from the women," vv. 10-11.
 - b. The people say, "Ezra, you're right, but it's damp and cold, and this is going to take awhile to straighten out," vv. 12-14.
 - 1) Notice what the people say in v. 12: "You are right! We must do as you say."
 - a) The people could have made excuses for their sin — they could have said, "Look, Ezra, everyone's doing it (they were)." But, again, the people admitted their fault.
 - b) The people agreed to rid themselves of their foreign wives just as Ezra said they must.
 - 2) But, it was the rainy season, and the people didn't want to stand outside.
 - a) There is some discussion as to the months are calculated in Ezra, but it appears that this episode is taking place around the week before Christmas.
 - b) That time of the year it's terribly rainy, damp, and cold in Jerusalem.
 - c) The people say, "We don't want to stand here in this cold rain, but let's take care of this."
 - 3) The plan was for the people to go back home and let those who had married foreign wives come at a set time and rid themselves of their foreign wives.
 4. Although the Israelites largely decided to move forward and do the right thing, four didn't want things to change at all — Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah, supported by Meshullarn and Shabbethai the Levite, opposed this, v. 15.
 - a. Some people don't like change at all, even if it's positive change. Some people are set in their ways and like things the way they've always been. I really think that these four men were like that.
 - b. May we never be ones to resist needed change!
 - 1) If there's sin involved, change is absolutely necessary.
 - 2) Let us be willing to change if we are involved in sin!
 - B. What we need to notice about the Israelites here is that they conspired about how they would make necessary changes.
 1. Often people want to change, but they don't have a plan to do so.
 - a. Someone might say, "I'm going to lose weight," but not have a plan for carrying that out.
 - b. He's not going to be very successful if he doesn't have a plan.

2. Likewise, when we need to rid our lives of sin, we need a plan for doing so.
 - a. What in your life do you need to change’?
 - b. What plans have you made to bring about those changes?

IN ORDER TO HAVE AN OLD TIME REVIVAL, WE CARRY OUT, vv. 16-17

- A. The exiles did as was proposed.
 1. Ezra selected heads of households and designated them by name.
 2. They sat down to investigate the cases, and by the first day of the first month, they had finished dealing with all the men with foreign wives.
- B. These were not individuals who just made a decision to make changes in their lives, but they carried out that decision.
 1. When we make a decision to do right, we need to carry out that decision.
 - a. In Scripture, we find individuals who carried out their decisions to do right.
 - 1) After the Book of the Law was found in Josiah’s reign, the king went throughout Judah restoring true worship (2 Ki. 23).
 - a) He removed from the temple all the pagan idols, he removed the pagan priests, and he removed the tents of the male temple prostitutes.
 - b) Josiah had made a decision to do right when he heard the Law of God, and he carried out that decision.
 - 2) Remember the Prodigal Son? He made a decision to go back to his father and make things right, and he carried out that decision.
 - b. The expression “The road to hell is paved with good intentions” comes from Dante’s Divine Comedy.
 - 1) As Dante’s guide took him to look at hell, on the wall was written all sorts of promises individuals had made to do right, but those individuals never carried out those promises.
 - 2) Is there not a great deal of truth in that? People determine, “I’m going to give up that habit”; “I’m going to change that part of my life”, but they never get around to doing it.
 2. Are there things in your life you need to change?
 - a. Have you been putting off making those changes’?
 - b. Do you need to come this morning and make changes in your life?
 - 1) We, as your brothers and sisters, are more than willing to help you make those changes.
 - 2) Will you allow us to help you as we stand and sing?