

## Ezra 10 - The Tragedy Ezra

**10** 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.<sup>2</sup> Then Shekariah 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."<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> Rise up; this matter is in your hands. We will support you, so take courage and do it."

<sup>5</sup> So 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.<sup>6</sup> Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. While he was there, he ate no food and drank no water, because he continued to mourn over the unfaithfulness of the exiles.

<sup>7</sup> A proclamation was then issued throughout Judah and Jerusalem for all the exiles to assemble in Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup> Anyone who failed to appear within three days would forfeit all his property, in accordance with the decision of the officials and elders, and would himself be expelled from the assembly of the exiles.

<sup>9</sup> Within the three days, all the men of Judah and Benjamin had gathered in Jerusalem. And on the twentieth day of the ninth month, all the people were sitting in the square before the house of God, greatly distressed by the occasion and because of the rain.<sup>10</sup> Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have been unfaithful; you have married foreign women, adding to Israel's guilt.<sup>11</sup> Now honor the LORD, the God of your ancestors, and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives."

<sup>12</sup> The whole assembly responded with a loud voice: "You are right! We must do as you say."<sup>13</sup> But there are many people here and it is the rainy season; so we cannot stand outside. Besides, this matter cannot be taken care of in a day or two, because we have sinned greatly in this thing.<sup>14</sup> Let our officials act for the whole assembly. Then let everyone in our towns who has married a foreign woman come at a set time, along with the elders and judges of each town, until the fierce anger of our God in this matter is turned away from us."<sup>15</sup> Only Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah, supported by Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite, opposed this.

<sup>16</sup> So the exiles did as was proposed. Ezra the priest selected men who were family heads, one from each family division, and all of them designated by name. On the first day of the tenth month they sat down to investigate the cases,<sup>17</sup> and by the first day of the first month they finished dealing with all the men who had married foreign women.



### Comedy & Tragedy

There are generally two forms of story.

The first is the Comedy.

This isn't about "ha ha" funny comedy the way we think of it today.

"Comedy" actually points towards a happy resolution.

A happy ending even though it might be through great sacrifice and cost.

"All's well that ends well," so to speak.

An example of this is original Star Wars

An empire has a galaxy under its tyrannical grip and a

band of freedom fighters destroy the death star against all odds.

Or Lord of the Rings, where a world under threat from an evil force triumphs.

The other form is that of Tragedy.

As opposed to the happy ending of comedies, tragedies end badly.

The Empire Strikes Back is a tragedy.

Romeo and Juliet is a Tragedy (apologies to those who haven't seen it).

Generally speaking, comedies dominate our movies and stories.  
Mainly because happy endings sell.  
We watch movies to be entertained, to forget our hard or mundane realities.  
Disney figured this out and have been banking on it for as long as anyone can remember.

There is a reason, however why tragedy and comedy must come together.  
They reflect real life.

And real stories, true stories have both things co-mingled.  
The best stories are ones in which you actually don't know how it might end.  
In fact, the greatest stories keep you on the edge of your seat  
because you can't be sure it will end well.  
It is like life - it is full of ups and downs with an equal mix of chaos and order.

It is also the reason why the gospel is so compelling.  
It hints at a happy ending but all circumstances point towards it's unlikelihood.  
Like all great stories, it is also not without complex conditions, consequences, sacrifices and costs.  
It's not a happy ending for everyone.  
I never is in all epic tales.

Why talk about tragedy and comedy in today's sermon?  
Because you need to know why stories, true and fictional are told.  
They are not designed to entertain you.  
The Bible is not meant to entertain you - it is meant to change you from the inside out.  
When Jesus tells a parable, he is warning us, he is encouraging us, he is teaching us.  
God's Story invited us to transform.

### **The Story of Ezra**



As in most true stories, the Story is not one with a simple Happy Ending.  
It begins as a dream come true.

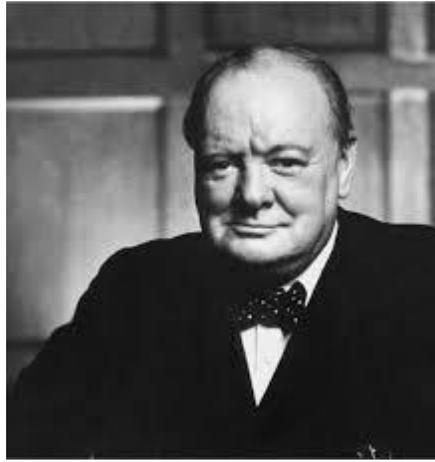
The people of God who were deported, exiled, relocated by Babylon is now returned by Persia.



Isaiah 45 refers to Cyrus as "anointed" - a Messiah, a Christ.  
Not to be confused with The Messiah.  
But he was to these people a seeming saviour.  
We have seen the saviours throughout history.



Washington of the Revolution, Napoleon of France, Lincoln of Emancipation



Hitler of Germany, Churchill of England, Stalin of Russia



Mao of the People's Revolution, Kim Il Sung of North Korea, Castro



Trump.

All heroes all at some point in their lives, saviours people looked to for hope.  
And you wonder why people were leery of messiahs even during Jesus' time.  
It was Castro who said, "Condemn me. It is of no importance. History will Absolve me."  
Bear in mind that history is written by the victors.  
But perhaps the truth will emerge entirely.  
The stories not finished or the stories that remain untold.  
But I digress...



As was preached by Vincent Ng about a month ago,  
Psalm 126:

When The LORD Restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed.  
Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy.

These people were ecstatic!

Not only did they feel the joy of return to a homeland they had lost, they returned to God.

They began to gather around the very centre of their culture and identity.

They saw themselves as God's people.

Chapters 7 & 8 tell this story and would have made a great ending.

Here they called out Ezra, a priest from the line of Aaron who was in Persia.

He was an expert in the law of Moses and he became their high priest.

He sets up the temple worship calls all the people to God.



If the story ends here, we have a comedy.  
A happy ending.  
Everything is resolved, everything is awesome.



But is this how the story goes?  
Is everything awesome?  
What happens after Christmas and New Years?  
What happens after graduation?  
What happens after the wedding?  
What happens after the promotion, the gold medal, the successful deal, the church retreat?  
What happens after a war?  
Do we get to sail into the sunset?  
Do we settle?  
Are we satisfied?



### **How the Cookie Crumbles**

Well, when things are going well, people find something or someone to complain about.  
Chapter 9 - complaint that people are not separated from non-Jews.  
This, they said, made them unholy.  
Ezra reacts dramatically tearing his clothes and tearing his hair.

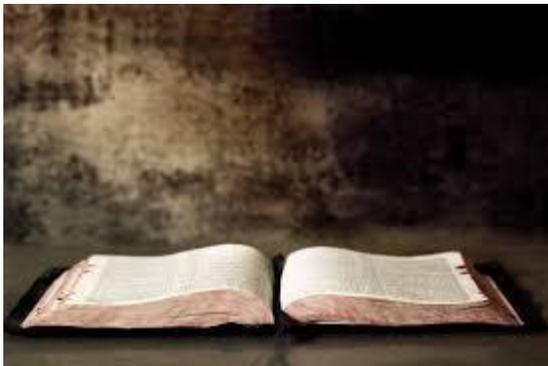
He prays a long prayer of confession before God publicly.  
He then gets up and says, "Let's get rid of all the foreign women and their children."  
The majority agree and the few dissenting voices are over-ruled.  
Anyone who has a mixed marriage must show up and register  
so they can be examined and judged.  
Otherwise, all their property is confiscated and exiled.  
Does this sound familiar to anyone?  
There are so many people that had intermarried that it takes 3 months to sort out.  
The book of Ezra ends with a list of these people that intermarried.  
It is a list of shame and condemnation.



Now is this a tragedy or a comedy?  
Are we now supposed follow this example to condemn all interracial marriages?



## WHAT CAN WE LEARN?



### **The Art & Science of Bible Interpretation**

Know the difference between descriptive and prescriptive passages.  
Descriptive can provide either an example to follow or a warning to not follow.  
Sometime it is spelled out, often it is not.  
The Bible just tells it Like it is.

Prescriptive statements are ones that are commands.  
So How can we know the difference?

### 1. Have Biblical Theology

Never build a position from a few verses out of context.

Read the Whole Bible in context.

Look for consistency with other parts of Scripture and understand context.

Eg. "I do not permit a woman to teach a man" (1 Tim. 2:12)

This is not consistent throughout Scripture. It is the only passage.

Passages About nations.

Gen 22:18, Jeremiah 3:17, Zechariah 2:6-12.

### 2. Understand Context

Context & Genre.

Always ask Questions to know the Spirit of the Law

What were the holiness laws for?

Matter of race or a matter of faith?

Eg. You must build a parapet on your roof.

You must have tassels on the four coners of your cloak.

You must not mix wool with linen in your clothing.

Deut. 22

These are all case laws where context is not given.

### 3. Know the Character of God

Compare with the Character of Christ.

The lineage of Jesus the Messiah is inclusive.

Rahab (or Jericho and a Prostitute)

Ruth the Moabite

Foreign Women!

Jesus actions and teaching as the litmus test of all Scripture.

His treatment of the Samaritan Woman.

His cleansing of the Temple court of Gentiles so Gentiles could worship.

So allow me to say unequivocally,

the condemnation of interracial marriage is odious and an abomination.

The litmus test of an your ethnocentrism or racist ideas is your reaction

to your children or your friends marrying outside your own ethnicity.

The Ezra account is descriptive and is a complete and utter tragedy.

It is ruinous to Israel's witness as God's people and a form of ignorance and unfaithfulness.

This has happened in almost every ethnicity.



### **Our Life Trajectory Can Change Over Time (for better or worse)**

Heroes can become tyrants.

Sinners can become saints.

Ordinary folks can become extraordinary.

Transformation happens.

Your decisions make a difference over time.

The things you choose accumulate.

There is restoration and redemption but there is also apostasy and backsliding.

1. Be Humble and self-reflective before The Holy Spirit.
2. Commit to a church where you are challenged to live for Christ.
3. Build friendships where you are accountable.



### **Religion can be manipulated as a Method of Control**

We have done things in the name of God that God would never do.

It is the meaning of taking the Lord's name in vain.

We use him for our convenience, to endorse our own perspectives.

Politics, Personal Lives, Cults, Religions

Ezra was the proto-pharisee.

Here, the decline of Israel's participation in God's mission begins.

It is the reason why a true messiah must come.

One who rectifies 300 years of bad practice.

For us there is only one example, one Messiah, One Christ - Jesus who is God in the flesh.

But it is not only Israel,

This is the legacy of church history.

Our sin has created power structure to control the lives of others.

It is a sin that is repeated again and again for centuries.

I am not going to name any denominations or church but you probably know some.

You may have even lived through a few.

This is why the existence of F3C is held by God and not us.

We are not here to create a legacy ourselves.

If our church does not serve the mission of God to call people to himself,  
If we bring more darkness than light,  
We have no right to exist.  
In fact, we should not exist at all.



### **Tragedy & Comedy**

This is the tragedy of certain lines of Christian Tradition:

Those who sought to free enslaved others.

Welcome to Human History.

As George Santayana wrote:

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

One of the places this quote is placed: Auschwitz, where 4 million Jew were exterminated in gas chambers.

This is why we preach the teaching of Jesus - So that you would not forget.

Those who remember the past can save the future.

By the grace of God and the Work of the Holy Spirit, however,

The gospel is still preached by those who are faithful to the call.

Who will sacrifice fame, fortune, comfort for the sake of the kingdom.

We exist because there have been those who were faithful before us.

Others will live in the light if we are faithful for those who come after us.

By the grace of God may your life be a part of the divine comedy and not a selfish tragedy.