

Preparing Our Hearts

Steve Bockmiller

In the year 458 BC, a scribe named Ezra led the second group of Israelite exiles from Babylon back to Jerusalem. From this expedition, we can appraise Ezra's spiritual demeanor. Ezra 7:10—For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel. Ezra understood how he fit into God's plan and he executed God's plan with diligence. Every element in the preceding verse represents a key element in the life of a Christian.

Ezra prepared his heart. To prepare your heart is to make yourself ready for a purpose. Ezra purposed in his heart to serve God diligently. The heart is the essence of the man. Proverbs 27:19 says that a man's heart reveals the man. Ezra's heart revealed that he prepared to seek, he prepared to do, and he prepared to teach God's law. What do our hearts reveal about us? Are we preparing to serve God or are we preparing to serve our own selfish interests?

Ezra sought the law of the Lord. Seeking describes a diligent search prompted by the hope of finding something of great value. We know that Ezra was a scribe; it was the job of a scribe to seek and to understand God's law in order to teach and to communicate that law to others. You cannot hope to find that for which you do not seek. What are we seeking? This world has much to offer by way of advancing and promoting our own interests; all such advancements require an expenditure of energy. It is fair to say that we spend too much time and too much energy seeking our own selfish interests. Prov. 8:17 - I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me. It is an awesome thought to know that we can seek God and be able to find him. How sad the judgment day will be for those who failed to open the Bible and seek his statutes.

Ezra practiced the law of the Lord. Not only did Ezra prepare in his heart to seek the law of the Lord, he practiced the law of the Lord. Ezra applied his knowledge and turned it into wisdom. Why is it that Christians struggle with the application of knowledge? I think it is because we fail to prepare our hearts and we fail to seek the law of the Lord. Those who prepare their hearts to seek God's law obviously see the value therein. They cherish what they find in the law; conviction compels them concerning the necessity of obedience to the law. In Nehemiah chapter 8, Ezra reads the law to the Israelites and it causes them to mourn and to weep because they realize what great wrongs they had committed against the Lord. This realization had an effect on their lives. When we seek the law of the Lord, we need to take action and we need to apply it to our lives. This process is the key to the success of any Christian. Matt 7:21 says that those who do make it to heaven will be the ones who did the will of God while on Earth.

Ezra taught the law of the Lord. Finally, we read that Ezra taught the statutes and the ordinances of the law to Israel. We are told in Mark 16:15 to preach the gospel to every

creature. Paul told Timothy in 2 Tim 2:2 to take the things he had heard from him and commit them to faithful men who would then be able to teach others. We have an urgent message that needs to be shared and yet we hold that message inside. I think that this results from failing to follow in the steps of Ezra.

If we do not prepare our hearts to serve God, we will not seek Him. If we do not seek His words, then we will fail to practice them; if we fail to practice God's word in our own lives, then we will fail to teach God's word to others. This process of influence is a natural flow; Satan will try to hinder any and all spiritual growth. We need to try to be more like Ezra. We need to prepare ourselves to seek, to practice, and to teach God's word.