

Needed: More Ezras

Joe Slater

Someone said, "The more things change, the more they remain the same." Scripture demonstrates the truth of that adage. Over 2400 years ago, Ezra emerged as a leader among the Jews. Ezra 7:10 says, "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." Despite the monumental changes in the last 2.4 millennia, these three basic qualities of godly leadership still apply!

Before looking at the traits themselves, consider the fact that "Ezra had prepared his heart . . ." For Ezra, being both scribe and priest (7:11) was no mere mechanical or intellectual exercise, nor was he motivated by greed or glory. Despite ignorant claims made today that the Mosaic Law required only outward obedience, Ezra knew that God has never been pleased with anything less than a completely devoted heart. So, what did Ezra do?

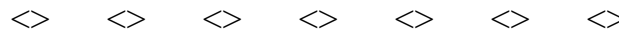
First, he prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord. Quite often, this word "seek" describes the legal process of investigation, when the facts of a case are researched and scrutinized. To "seek" the Law of the Lord, then, is to delve into it in a diligent effort to find and learn the truth. Ezra was a passionate student of the Scriptures. Hurriedly browsing a couple of chapters just before falling asleep each night definitely would not have satisfied him!

Next, Ezra prepared his heart to do God's will. What good is learning unless it is accompanied by doing? "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). "Therefore to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). Obedience to God's word made Ezra a

good example, thereby enhancing his effectiveness as a teacher. And that leads to the last point . . .

Ezra prepared his heart to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel. Living in Babylon about 80 years after the Jews had been freed from captivity, Ezra understood clearly why God had sent His people into captivity in the first place. In short, they had utterly failed to obey God's Law. Though the kings and the people themselves bore some responsibility, the priests certainly failed to teach the people as they ought to have done. Ezra was determined to do his part to prevent a repeat performance!

Who among us today will prepare his heart to seek God's word, to do it, and to teach it to others? This need knows no limit! Every Christian is a priest, and each of us ought to be a diligent student of the word. We must not merely call Jesus "Lord," but do what He says (Luke 6:46). That surely includes teaching His word to our neighbors, both near and far, making "disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:19). May God help us to be more like Ezra!



A Cure For Hiccups

A lady asked a pharmacist if he had a cure for the hiccups. "I sure do," he replied, and immediately yelled, "boo!" at the top of his lungs. This scared the lady half to death! She looked at him and asked, "Why in the world did you do that?" The pharmacist said, "Because a good scare will rid a person of hiccups." The lady then said, "But I don't have hiccups; my husband does, and he's out in the car!"

Oops! Now there's an illustration of how assumptions can be costly. However, the most costly assumptions occurs in the spiritual realm. How many people assume they are believing and practicing the things that please God? How many people believe things that they have never bothered to read and study for themselves? How many times do you think God will hear someone say in the day of judgment, "But I thought . . .?"

The Bible says, "prove all things; hold fast to that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:22). (Steve Higginbotham; via *Bulletin Gold*)

Wind Chimes

'For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.' Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened' (1 Peter 3:12-14).

Sometimes, in writing, one can improve on the words of others. Sometimes not. I recently read the following thought which seems to say it just right, and I cannot improve: "Do you have wind chimes at your house? The next time you face a storm, listen carefully. Along with the howling wind, you might hear a beautiful sound from the chimes. They are making music in the midst of a storm. That is a parable of our lives. In the face of the greatest storms of our lives, we can make beautiful music."

This brought to mind the song "Stand By Me." The lyrics of this song speak of the storms of life i.e. tribulation, faults and failures, persecution and, finally, growing old and feeble.

Two of the great truths of life are these: 1) During our lifetime we, all, endure trials of various kinds. 2) If we listen (watch diligently), we will find sweet music amidst those storms.

With God's help we can make sweet music and we can also hear the sweet music that God makes for us.

The question is, during the storms will we just cringe in fear and "hope for the best"? Or, will we listen to the sweet music that God provides for His own? The choice is ours. God does not always stop the storms from coming, but He will bring the sweet music of peace to our lives, if we allow it to be so.

I am now growing old and, in some ways, feeble. During my lifetime I have, personally, observed some stormy periods. During those times I found that, with just a little patience, I could soon hear the sweet music of God's care, concern and helpful blessings in it all. "But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you" (Psalm 5:11).

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