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THE WRITTEN WORD

Bethany Bible Church, Adult Sunday School Class, December 13, 2009

Setting Our Hearts to Share the Word

“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 7:10).

Our study of God’s word wouldn’t be complete without thinking together about our need to share the riches of God’s revealed truth with others. This can be illustrated by looking at the map in the back of your Bible. Up at the top of the land of Israel is the Sea of Galilee. It’s always fresh because it not only receives fresh water from the mountain ranges of the north, but also sends that water forth in a constant flow in a southerly direction down the Jordan River. What flows in is also constantly flowing out.

But the Dead Sea, into which the Jordan feeds, is constantly stagnant because nothing of what is fed into it goes anywhere. And when it comes to the Bible, many of us are like the Dead Sea--always receiving, but stagnant because we never give out what we’ve take in. Instead, may we strive to be like the fresh waters of the Sea of Galilee--constantly passing on to others what we what we receive from the eternal words of truth.

A good pattern to follow in this is given to us in the life-commitment of the godly, Old Testament scribe Ezra.

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Ezra lived about 500 years before Jesus was born; and as a scribe, his task was to study the Old Testament Scriptures and to teach them to his kinsmen. And what’s more, he lived in exciting times. Israel had been punished by God for having disobeyed His commandments; and had been taken away from their homeland to live in exile in Babylon for 70 years. But when those 70 years were up, God allowed His people to return to their homeland.

When God brought His people back to their homeland, He wanted to give them a strong leader who would teach them what God says in His Scriptures, and how He wants them to live. And God chose Ezra to be that man because, according to Ezra 7:10, he had set (or “prepared”) his heart early on to do three things that made him useful:

I. TO STUDY GOD’S WORD.

- A. Perhaps that’s why he grew up to be a scribe. He made the decision that he was going to “seek” (that is, study) the Scriptures thoroughly and know them well. One way we can make ourselves useful to God is to make the decision--wherever we are in life--to set our hearts to study the Bible daily.
- B. It’s easy to excuse ourselves from this step. The Bible is so big; and we don’t always understand what it says. And some of us are, admittedly, not good readers. But we don’t have to let these things stop us from ‘setting our hearts’ to do it. Once we set our hearts to do a thing, we get better at it.
- C. A recommended course of action is to use the Bible Reading Journal sheets that our church provides. Just start in the Gospel of Matthew, and read a chapter a day until you go all the way through the New Testament. Then start in Genesis, and read a chapter a day until you go all the way through the Old Testament. Keep on doing it every day; and before you read, pray and ask God to help you understand, so that you will be useful to Him. Don’t quit. After a while, you’ll be surprised at how much of the Bible you’ve come to know.

II. TO OBEY GOD'S WORD.

- A. Ezra didn't just read the Bible, however, just to fill his head with knowledge. He also 'set his heart' to obey it--that is, to put it into practice in his life. When he studied the Bible and saw what God said in it, he then asked, "What does this mean that God wants me to do? If this is true, then how does God want me to live?" And then, when he discovered what God wanted him to do from the Scriptures, he did it.
- B. God uses people that He knows will do what He says (Matthew 7:24-27). Every time you read from your Bible, pray and ask God to show you what He wants you to do about what He says. And once you know, do it! Obey! Decide today that you will set your heart to put it into practice.

III. TO TEACH GOD'S WORD TO OTHERS.

- A. Finally, notice that Ezra didn't keep all this good stuff to himself. He "set his heart" to not only study and to obey, but also to "teach statutes and ordinances in Israel". Ezra set his heart to teach what God said to others. And that's what God used him to do in a great way. He is remembered as a great man in the history of Israel, because he was a teacher to Israel of God's word.
- B. God has things that He wants people to know. He wants them to know about Him and what He is like. He wants them to know how He wants them to live, and how to solve their problems His way. He wants them to know about the love He has shown them in sending His Son Jesus to die on the cross for their sins. He wants them to know that Jesus is alive and is able to change their lives. There's no greater adventure anyone can ever have than to be used by God to change the lives of other people. There's no greater privilege than to show people the things God says in His word. When you teach God's commandments and instructions to others, you can be a blessing to many, many people! You can even be used by God to change the world! What a great adventure that is! But it doesn't happen. You have to get yourself ready. You have to set your heart now to teach God's word to others, so that you'll be ready when He wants to use you.

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Note that things have to happen in their proper order. What would have happened if Ezra had set his heart to be a teacher of God's word before he set his heart to study it or obey it? He wouldn't have been a very good teacher--and he wouldn't have been very useful to God. The more we set our hearts to study God's word, the better prepared we are to obey it correctly. And the more we set our heart to obey God's word, the better prepared we are to teach it to others. It probably sounds to if we have to do that our whole lives long--and that's right! But the more we study, the more we'll know. And the more we'll know, the better we'll obey. And the better we'll obey, the more effective we'll be as a teacher of God's word to others.

So hang in there! Decide today that--like Ezra--you'll "set your heart" to be useful to God's great purposes by studying the word, obeying the word, and teaching the word to others.