

A Heart Prepared

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- [0 : 00] Welcome to Service's Morning. Special welcome to any who may be visiting with us. We come before God to worship His name and we look to Him to help us do that.
- As we come under the sound of His Word, may we be attentive to it. We'll begin by singing to His praise, Psalm 121. Psalm 121. We'll sing the whole of this psalm to God's praise.
- I to the hills will lift mine eyes, from whence doth come my need. My safety cometh from the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made. Thy fruit he'll not let slide, nor will he slumber that he keeps. Behold he that keeps Israel, he slumbers not nor sleeps.
- The Lord thee keeps, the Lord thy shade, on thy right hand doth stay. The moon by night thee shall not smite, nor yet the sun by day.
- The Lord shall keep thy soul, he shall preserve thee from all ill. Henceforth I going out and in, God keep, for ever will.
- [1 : 17] The whole of Psalm 121 to God's praise. I to the hills will lift mine eyes. I to the hills will lift mine eyes. From whence doth come my name.
- My safety cometh from the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made.
- Thy fruit he'll not let slide, nor will he slumber that he keeps. Behold he that in Israel.
- His campers not nor sleep. The Lord he keeps. The Lord he keeps. The Lord he keeps.
- All night right up doth stay. The moon by night thee shall not smite, nor yet the sun by day.
- [3 : 12] The Lord shall keep thy soul, he shall preserve thee from all ill.
- And for thy glory, O God, and in, God keep what ever will.
- Let us join together in prayer. Let us pray. Let our blessed God, as we gather in your presence and in your name, may we be solemnized even by reason of that thought.
- There is never a moment in our human experience where we are not found within the all-seeing eye of the God who is ever-present and who is all-seeing.
- We give thanks that this eye is a benevolent eye, that it is an eye of mercy and grace, and that each one of us in our own experience can testify to the goodness of God in different ways.
- [4 : 54] Even though there are times when we are defiantly ascribing to God a spirit that is malevolent and that is hateful and that is the actions of an enemy.
- And yet, in reality, our own activities deserve nothing less than that we would be subject to your anger at the very least, and to a holy indifference where we would be left to our own devices.
- This is the world in which we live and we have God in it or we have God as if you are not ever present or that your activity is not to be acknowledged or recognized or admitted.
- But that does not change who you are, what you are, or the world in which we live. We pray for help when we fail to appreciate who you are.
- We pray for help when we fail to see who you are.

- [6 : 54] As we gaze upon the beauty of a living and a loving Saviour, even Christ Jesus the righteous. We pray for blessing to be imparted to us in his name today.
- We bring your cares and concerns to you, seeking your blessing upon us as a congregation, a gathered congregation here with all the needs that are known to you, many of them hidden from any one of us except those who have these circumstances that are personal and private to themselves.
- We pray for them. We pray for them. As we pray for ourselves, we can pray for the collective body of worshipping people.
- We can pray for the extended congregation, those who form part of it, although they are not able to be with us at this time.
- We pray for the community. We pray for the community, where this congregation is a small part, and yet the community itself is so much in the interests of the congregation, even though the community may be disinterested in the activities of the congregation.
- [8 : 21] Your people are a praying people. And you pray for those who may not pray for themselves. You pray for them in their hopes and aspirations.
- You pray for them in their homes, their families, their places of work, their going out and coming in. We ask, O Lord, that the spirit of prayer would be active in the lives of those who profess your name, that we would carry the burdens of those who have these burdens.
- We remember those who are part of a congregation who are unwell. Some are confined to their homes. Some are confined to hospital or the hospice, being cared for by those who have that calling.
- We pray for their recovery. Thankful that you have equipped men and women to fulfil a calling for the medical needs of those who are in situations where ordinary men and women are out of their depths.
- But because of the equipping of the God of heaven, who may not even be in the thinking of those who are entrusted with training, nurses and doctors and carers of all descriptions, nevertheless we are indebted to you, O God, that you have purposed that others would be your hands and your feet and your eyes and your mouth, as you work in our midst.
- [10 : 23] So we pray for the certification of all that is done to the good of those who have to suffer at this time. We ask for the recovery and for recognition of God in their hearts.
- We pray for those who are sad, sorrowful, those whose hearts are rent by reason of death.
- Your voice has been heard within our congregation in recent days. We pray for those who are mourning wherever their lot is cast today.
- Even those who, by reason of bereavement, have reminders given to them of loved ones who may have gone some time before, and yet the pain and the loss that they experienced has been brought to their attention.
- So we pray that you would be mindful of the needs that we present to you. Thankful that it is at the throne of grace. We pray for the proclamation of the gospel today.
- [11 : 40] Thankful that you have sent out those who would speak of Christ to others. We would pray that those who have been called to that work, that they would be encouraged in it.
- That they would have souls for their hire. We are mindful in particular of those who are setting out in a gospel ministry, thinking particularly of the congregation of North U.S.

And we ask for your servant to set over that congregation to be encouraged as he begins that task. And others who may be training, and even those who have yet to begin training, we commend and commend them to the God who is able to fill their hearts and minds with the thoughts of Christ, and that will be persuaded of their calling and encouraged to speak of and of him, and to seek clarity of purpose in setting this Christ before young and old, wherever their calling takes them.

We pray for our nation that has turned its back on the gospel. You are able to enable us to repent and turn from the ways that you follow that take us away from yourself.

We ask the Lord that you would speak to us so that we would hear your voice to be heard and to be acted upon.

[13 : 27] So bless our sovereign, his family, those who govern us in his name, in the parliaments, in the council, in all places that authority is given to men and women to direct the lives of others for the good of society as a whole.

Be merciful to the world in which we live that is so daily presented with woes that are there to be seen, war-turned regions of the world.

And the loss of life is so awful that we cannot even comprehend it. We are separated from it by miles, and yet we see it on our televisions, and we are in many ways anaesthetized against it because we are so remote from it.

And yet the truth is that the awful reality of the sorrows that the enmity that is stirred up in the heart of man against his neighbour is there for all to see.

Whether that is in Ukraine or the Yemeni or wherever we see hostilities that have gone on for so long, resulting not just in the devastation that war brings but the aftermath, of the fact that the enemy of the world is there for all to see.

[15 : 01] And the people of the world are in the world, where there are the nations that have spent their means to procure armament, so that this resource that could be theirs for the good of society is no longer available.

So we see the vulnerable exposed to starvation and to the horrors of illnesses, which are curable but because of lack of resource.

These resources are not available. Lord, show us the foolishness of the actions that are ours and must be owned as ours.

We pray for forgiveness and we pray for light in the midst of darkness. And we pray for your word to have free course amongst us.

We bless all the activities of the congregation amongst young and old. We pray for the Sunday school and all that is taught therein. Bless the teachers and the young children who are under their care.

[16 : 14] Keep us safe, we pray. Cleanse from sin in Jesus name. Amen. And boys and girls, before you go out to Sunday school, I think today you're going to be thinking about the way the word of God, the gospel, began to be preached.

How people began to hear about Jesus Christ. And when we think about the passion of Jesus, what do we know about him?

Well, we know that he lived many, many years ago. And yet we talk about him still today. We know that he lived very far away.

And yet here we are in Calanish talking about somebody who lived long ago and far away. And why is it that we would want to talk about the passion of Jesus?

Why would you want to say anything about such a passion? Well, the main reason is that this passion is the passion that every one of us must get to know.

[17 : 25] Without exception. It doesn't matter who you are. I believe with all my heart that every one of us here must get to know Jesus for ourselves.

And I think it's the most wonderful of privileges that we have that such a passion has been brought to our attention through the gospel.

What you are looking at today is the early progress of the gospel. And Peter, one of Jesus' friends, begins to tell others about Jesus.

He begins to share with others the good news about Jesus. And one of the people that he meets is a man called Cornelius.

Now Cornelius is somebody like ourselves, believe it or not. Somebody who didn't know anything about Jesus. He was a Roman. He was somebody who was raised in a community that believed that there were many gods.

[18 : 38] And that all of these gods were gods that you had to be afraid of or that you had to serve in some way.

But Cornelius, in God's goodness, came to discover that these gods were not really God at all.

They were false gods. They were false gods. And he sought God for himself. He looked for God. And like so many who, when God speaks to them, and sometimes speaks to them through his own word, they think that they'll find their way to God, and they'll follow a path that they think will take them to God.

And sometimes the path that they follow will do that. It will take them to where they want to go, to find God and to get to know God and to get to know God's way in Christ.

But sometimes it happens that they go on a path that doesn't really get them to where they want to go.

[19 : 53] And Cornelius, although he was a Roman, became a Jew. He became somebody who thought that they could know God through the Jewish religion.

And he was right in a sense, but he stopped short of meeting the person who was able to be a savior to him in his needs.

And that person was Jesus. But in God's goodness, he came to find Jesus through the preaching of the gospel.

And that sometimes happens in different ways. Some ways that we follow are the wrong ways. Some events, instead of being helpful, they're hindrances.

But for Cornelius, he came to meet with somebody who would tell him who Jesus was and what Jesus did. And do you think that would be the end of the story?

[20 : 58] That would be a good end, surely. To come to find Jesus for yourself. To come to know salvation through Jesus for yourself.

And that's important. But I think that there's also this. That the person who comes to find Jesus for themselves is somebody, once he does that, or once she does that, is somebody who wants to tell others about Jesus.

That's not the end of the story for them. Once they have found this passion. Once God has made himself known to them through this passion.

Once they have discovered what faith in Jesus Christ is. They've discovered the fact of sin. They've discovered a fear of sin.

Once they've discovered the faith that is necessary for them to come to believe in Christ.

[22 : 05] And to experience the forgiveness of sin. All of that. Then they want to share that faith with others. And that was what was true about Cornelius.

Once he knew Peter was coming. Once he heard Peter speaking. What did he do? He called for his friends. And he called for his neighbors.

And he called for his family. And he said, come. Come with me. And hear for yourself this passion that has made all the difference in my life.

And I would be surprised if there is any passion here today. Who knows that Jesus for themselves. Who have kept that a secret.

If they know that Jesus for themselves. Do you think they've said, I'll keep this quiet. I'm not going to let anyone else know about it.

[23 : 04] Well, if that is the case. I very much question whether they've made that Jesus for themselves. Because I can't imagine a passion.

Just like the lady who met Jesus at the well. The woman of Samaria. She went and told others. Come.

Come, she said. See this passion who told me all things I ever did. She couldn't keep it hidden. And that's what's happened today. Even as you go out to Sunday school.

You know what your teachers are doing. They're telling you about the Jesus that they came to know. So that you can come to know that Jesus for yourself.

Because we all need to get to know him. And isn't it good that he didn't keep that quiet. That he didn't keep it a secret in Palestine.

[24 : 02] That he didn't keep it a secret on the other side of the world. That here in Kalanish we still hear about him. In order to believe in him. Well, I hope you do. We're going to sing there as we go out to Sunday school.

Some verses from Psalm 119. Psalm 119 and at verse 41. We'll sing this section of the psalm.

Let thy sweet mercy also come and visit me, O Lord. Even thy benign salvation according to thy word.

So shall I have wherewith I may give him an answer just. Who spitefully reproaches me for in thy word I trust. The word of truth out of my mouth take thou not utterly.

For on thy judgments righteous my hope. Doth still reliable sing to verse 48. Let thy sweet mercy also come and visit me, O Lord.

[25 : 08] O Lord. With thy sweet mercy also come and visit me, O Lord.

In thy benign salvation according to thy word.

So shall I have wherewith I may give him an answer just.

To shall I have wherewith I may give him an answer just. For in thy word I trust. For in thy word I trust. For in thy word I trust. The word of truth out of my life. For in thy word I trust. For in thy word I trust.

The word of truth out of my life. The word of truth out of my life. The word of truth out of my life.

[26 : 27] Take thou not utterly. God of truth out of my life. God of thy judgment.

God of my life. God of my life.

So shall I keep forevermore thy law continually.

And since the time I precepts thee, I walk at liberty.

I speak thy word to kings, and I with shame shall not be new.

[27 : 49] And will delight myself always, everly lost which I love.

To thy commandment, which I love, my hands lift up thy will.

And I will also meditate upon thy judge's day.

We're going to read from the scriptures of the Old Testament and from the book of Ezra. The book of Ezra, and we're going to read from chapter 7.

Ezra follows the second book of Chronicles. Now, after these things, in the reign of Artheserxes, king of Persia, Ezra, the son of Seraia, the son of Asaria, the son of Hilkiah, the son of Shalom, the son of Sadoc, the son of Ahitub, the son of Amariah, the son of Asaria, the son of Mario, the son of Zariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukhi, the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eliezer, the son of Aaron, the chief priests.

[29 : 42] This Ezra went up from Babylon, when he was already scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given. And the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him.

And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and of the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nathanians, and to Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artheserxes the king.

And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon. And on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him.

For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments. Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artheserxes gave unto Ezra the priest.

The scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of his statutes to Israel. Artheserxes, king of kings, and to Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law for the God of heaven, perfect peace, and at such a time.

[31 : 03] I make a decree that all they of the people of Israel, of his priests, and Levites in my realm, which are minded of their own free will, to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee.

For as much as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand, and to carry the silver and gold which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose application is in Jerusalem, and all the silver and gold that thou canst find in all the provinces of Babylon, with the free will offering of the people, and of the priests offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem, that thou mayest buy speedily with this money, bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem.

And whatsoever shall seem good to thee and to thy brethren, to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your God, the vessels also that are given thee for the service of the house of thy God, those who live thou before the God of Jerusalem.

And whatsoever more shall be needed for the house of thy God, which thou shalt have occasion to bestow, bestow it out of the king's treasure house. And I, even I, of the services of the king, to make a decree to all the treasures which are beyond the river, that whatsoever is thou the priest, the scribe of the law of God, the God of heaven, shall require of you it be done speedily, unto one hundred talents of silver, and to one hundred measures of wheat, and to one hundred baths of wine, and to one hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much.

Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven. For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?

[33 : 09] The king and his sons. And also we certify you that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, nethinims, and ministers of this house of God.

It shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom upon them. And thou wester after the wisdom of thy God that is in thine hand, said, Magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that have begun the river, all such as know the laws of thy God, and teach ye them that know them not.

And whosoever will not do the law of thy God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon them, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.

Blessed be the Lord, God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart to beautify the house of the Lord, which is in Jerusalem.

And hath extended mercy unto me before the king and his counsellor, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.

[34 : 26] And so on. May the Lord add his blessing to a reading of his word, and to his name be the praise. We're going to sing now from Psalm 110.

Psalm 110 from the beginning down to verse 5. Five stanzas. The Lord did say unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thy foes a stone whereon thy feet may stand.

The Lord shall out of Zion send the rod of thy great power. In midst of all thine enemies be thou the governor. A willing people in thy day of power shall come to thee.

In holy beauties from born's womb thy youth like Jew shall be. And so on to verse 5. The Lord did say unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand.

The Lord did say unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thy foes a stone, whereon thy feet may stand.

[36 : 03] The Lord shall out of Zion send, The Lord of thy great power.

In midst of all thine enemies Be thou the governor, a willing people in thy day.

A prayer shall come to thee in holy beauty.

In the long-born home thy youth, my church shall be.

The Lord himself hath made an oath.

[37 : 29] And will repay him never. Of your dead all will kiss the day.

Thou art a priest forever. The glorious and mighty Lord.

That sits at thy right hand. The earnestest of thy crown.

Kings that in him was done Shall we for a short time turn to the passage that we read together In the book of Esra, chapter 7 We'll read again, verse 10 For Esra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it And to teach in Israel statutes and judgments We're going to consider these words today First of all setting them in their historical context And then think about what it means to prepare your heart

What it means to seek the law of the Lord Thirdly, whatever To know how to do it or what we are to do And finally the injunction to teach others Now all of these things, I suppose you could insist Are relevant to the role that Esra, the scribe has And that is undoubtedly true But it also can be argued that what we are confronted with here in this section of scripture Is a reminder to us of something that we were just saying to the children

[40 : 30] About the necessity that there is For those who have come to a knowledge of God To share that knowledge with others We can begin with setting this book In some kind of context If you're familiar with the scriptures You'll know, as we said in the introduction to a reading That the book of Esra It's not one we come to very often It's not one we read very often And it's usually read in conjunction with another book That is similar in content The book of Nehemiah It concerns some of the same things That are of interest to both of these men But the second book of Chronicles Which comes before this book of Esra

Its concluding words are Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia That the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah Might be accomplished The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia That he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom And put it also in writing Saying Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia All the kingdoms of the earth Hath the Lord God of heaven given me And he hath charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem Which is in Judah Who is there among you Of all his people The Lord is God Be with him And let him go up Now if you read the first verses Of the book of Esra You will find That the words there Are almost The same As the words that end

The second book of Chronicles Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia That the word of the Lord By the mouth of Jeremiah Might be fulfilled The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia That he made a proclamation Throughout all his kingdom And put it also in writing Saying Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia The Lord God of heaven Hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth And he hath charged me to build him a house At Jerusalem Which is in Judah And so on Now you would Instinctively Having Seen The Order of the books In the Old Testament Conclude that This is just a natural overlap That one book If it follows In sequence In the books of the Bible Then you could expect There to be some kind of continuation

And The The Bible story As it is being told May from May on occasion Seafoot To have this kind of overlap So that there is An understanding And it is a continuation That what is in the book of Esra Is just simply A follow on To what is In the second book of Chronicles Now if you are a historian You will know that History is really A record Of past events If in your In your capacity as a historian You involve chronology Chronology In history Is putting these Events of the past In the order In which they occurred So chronologically

Historically You would expect The book of Esra Following The second book of Chronicles To have this Sequence And the time Between The two You know They would just be Following Almost To To the date One after the other But the thing about The book of Esra Is that Those who Study them Those who are Spoken of Within the book Will find that There is a Seventy year gap Almost Between the events That are recorded In the second book Of Chronicles And the events That are Recorded In the book Of Esra And While the Bible Is at times Intent on

[45 : 40] Setting before us A historical Timeline Which can be Followed It is not Bound by The rules of Chronology At all times Because The purpose Of the Bible Is to set Forth To set Before the reader God's Purposes In the salvation Of The fallen Race Of Adam And sometimes It may fall Perfectly Properly That the Line of History And chronology Are followed Exactly But sometimes It doesn't Necessarily Fall in that Order It's not that There's anything Wrong But if you Look more Closely At what is In the book Of Esra What you'll Understand And it's also Mentioned In The passages

That we find In the book Of Nehemiah That God's Purposes For bringing His people Back from Babylonian Captivity Where they Had spent 70 years God was Purposing To bring Them back To that And he Was doing So miraculously And the Miracle is Seen in The kings Such as Cyrus And the King that's Spoken of In this Passage Artaxerxes That they Are recognizably Involved In bringing God's People Back to Jerusalem And to Re-engage With the Worship of God as They once Did But that They were Because of God's Judgment On them Because they Had gone Away from Him Had Served It's Purpose So what

We find Is that The initial Decree That's Offered By Cyrus That allows God's People to Return to Their Homeland And Initially Only a Small Number Come Back And if You know The story That small Number Begin When they Return To Rebuild The Walls Of Jerusalem And They Begin To Rebuild The Temple Walls But The initial Activity That is Witnessed Comes to A halt Because of Various Activities On the Part of The Enemy Those who

Have enmity Still Against God's People They Are frustrated In their Purposes And The Initial Burst Of Steel Which Sees The Temple Begin To Be Rebuild Persecution Prevents Them From Continuing It Then we See Another Flurry Of Activity When We See the Account In the Book of Haggai And the Book of How he Returned And Haggai And Zechariah Are Amongst Those Who Returned To The Land And They Begin Again To Carry Out The Work That Had Stopped And Then Further On There Is Another Period Of Activity So The Record

Is Precise But The Activity Is Carried Out Over A Period The Initial Command The Initial Word Coming From The King Whose Word Was Law Was Carried Out But It Was Frustrated By Various Providences So The The Book Of Ezra Has In Part Something To Say About That But Actually When You Read Through The Book Of Ezra The Person Whose Name Is On The Book Does Not Really Feature Till He's Mentioned Here In Chapter 7 Which Seems Strange He Is There's A Question Mark About Who The Author Of The Book Is Although It Bears The Name Ezra Ezra Is A Formidable Character Who Has A Role To Play Within

[50 : 45] God's Purposes And Yet It's Not The Story Of A Person It's A Story About A People And The God Of The People And The Way In Which He Overrules Conan In And another strange thing is that when we talk about Babylonian exile, we're talking about a people who had been forcibly removed from their homes and had to go so many miles away to a strange land.

That you're talking about the return of these exiles and yet Ezra was not returning because he had never been to Jerusalem.

He had never been to Judah, he had never been there. He was born in captivity although he was a Jew. He was raised as a Jew, he was taught as a Jew.

His role as a scribe tells us that he was a Jew through and through but he is not returning to somewhere that he had left because his people had been taken from there.

So in verse 6 what we see told us about this person is, This Ezra went up from Babylon and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses which the Lord the God of Israel had given.

[52 : 39] And the king granted him all his request according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him. And this is a description given to us of the suitability of Ezra to the task in hand.

And a task that was entrusted to him that enabled him to do that. Somebody that God chose to follow good.

A ready scribe in the law of Moses. Now the, again, introduction is necessarily long but simply to remind you that your thoughts, my thoughts at least, on the role of a scribe may be informed by encounters with scribes in the New Testament.

And we know that they have a very negative picture because they were the enemies of Christ. There are the scribes and the Pharisees and the Sadducees and they were the religious leaders of their own day.

And they have a very bad press if you're reading the New Testament. But originally the scribe had a role and that role was simple to write down the Holy Scriptures, God's Word and having written then to expound and explain what the Word was all about.

[54 : 26] And that was the role of Ezra. This was a role that he occupied and he gave credibility to because of his zeal and his honour to God.

And he was identified as such someone who who was a ready scribe. It's only through the passage of time that the role of scribe became adulterated.

there was the additional writings of the scribes additional to what God said and then you had a layer upon layer of writings that the scribes of old were responsible for.

But at this point the scribe Ezra has a very legitimate role to play and he's got a very lofty desire. And God speaks to us through the work of the scribe.

So very briefly what does it mean for a person like Ezra to have to prepare his heart? Well you're saying well it's obvious this person was important this person had a very important role to play and you would expect a higher standard to apply to him than would apply to normal ordinary job blocks.

[56 : 00] But that is not the case. While it is certain that Ezra was somebody who conscientiously and deliberately prepared his heart for the work that he did it is something that the word of God tells us is necessary if we are to take God's word seriously.

what does it mean for a person to prepare their heart? I think the best way and the most certain way that we are able to do it is to understand what the Bible says to us about the need for heart preparation because it is the Bible that tells us why the heart needs to be prepared to receive the word of God.

The prophet Jeremiah tells us that the heart the heart of all men without exception he says is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked and he puts a question mark after it who can know it?

Now you might say well that's not right I know I've read about wicked men I've read about people who are clearly not right with God or would not right with man even and I could argue that such a person exists on the face of this planet and many of them and all of that is their heart is evil and we're ready to acknowledge that but there are many ways in which we can see that wickedness when things are open and apparent and wrong for example I was reading yesterday's present journal not the paper I usually buy if I buy any at all and there's an account there of somebody who maliciously and deliberately set out to deceive others and he persuaded others that there was money to be made if they invested in a diamond mine and he got money from these people that he deceived and many of them were vulnerable many of them were old and many of them were his friends and it is just one example amongst countless examples that you can find if you read your newspaper or listen to the news of the kind of activity that you see that is ongoing in the world and it's not unique and it's not individuals but you see it repeatedly and you're aware of it happening and what you ask what the source of that is who is the perpetrator why is this allowed to go on and the reason that you have to come to is that that is something that is so common and the commonality of it suggests to you something that the bible explains to you that the reason for it is found closer to home far closer than we give credence to and again you might say not mine not my heart not my way

Jesus himself when he was preaching the gospel spoke about the wickedness that is common place but he spoke of it at a personal level out of the heart he says proceeds evil thoughts murders adulteries fornication thefts false witness blasphemies and the source is the heart and he doesn't see the heart of an exclusive body of people who are set apart because of their wickedness no he says it's it is the source of all evil and the heart of man as is said before the flood God saw the wickedness of man's heart was great throughout the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was evil continually now that's what what necessitates however that wickedness however that evil comes to light however it manifests itself sometimes in the extremes that we're willing to acknowledge as being the things that are truly wicked and evil and wrong but if you examine your own heart in light of what the Bible says to you is true of it perhaps the greatest wickedness that you can discern is the desire that there is in your heart to resist the encroaches of God upon the territory you claim as your own your life your heart your ways all of that you say this is mine to do with as

[61 : 48] I choose and no one not even God has a right to encroach in this territory and what you're doing at that moment is you're resisting the the approaches of God in his grace presenting to you something that is a remedy for this sin that is in your life however great or however excessive it may appear if the heart by nature is like that and I introduce that if for your benefit I don't doubt for one minute how the heart of man is by nature and I think any Christian here who has begun the life of faith that what is true of them is as they go on in the life of faith that they are discovering darkest regions in their heart that they never knew existed now well you'll say if you're not a Christian there's the

Christian for you that's the kind of people they are people who are hiding away their wickedness from the sight of man they're wicked yes I agree and their Christianity is just a veil it's just a cloak it's just something that hides away what they are by nature well that's your opinion of them it may be but it's their opinion their opinion of what they are by nature what they have discovered in the light of God's word is that there are darkneses there that sin has brought into their experience that they are incapable of mastering without the help of God and this is the whole purpose of the of the scribe he says that he prepared his heart he tried with God's help to do what was necessary to enable him to deal with the word of

God and if part of the problem of man's heart is one of atheism and one of divine denial then that is an area of the heart's activity that has to be dealt with and only God can teach us how to do that the response is to prepare the heart to seek God's law and there is a stimulus in that sense if we are discovering the evil of our heart the desperate weakness of our heart then we need to understand then that there is only one way we can deal with it we can't discover God's truth if we have hurdles put in a way that prevent us from doing it you know if God's word tells you something about you you personally and you've read the bible and you've read a passage and just like

Cornelius the holy spirit of god has come to you as you read the bible and you may not be familiar with the holy spirit you may not be aware of how the holy spirit works but as you're reading the bible shows you something about yourself or about where you are in relation to god and how dangerous that place is for you what do you do then well what you would do perhaps is you either agree with it and say to yourself well what am I supposed to do about this situation what can I do how am I going to deal with this that god has shown me that is true about myself that makes me feel so bad about myself how can I deal with that and maybe one answer is

I don't want to deal with it you'll just put it to one side and say this is just a word this is just a book this is just the words of some ancient that has no longer any relevance to this current climate that we live in we've learned much more than the people who lived in Ezra's day we've discovered much more about society and its ills and how to deal with them and how to handle them and how to improve upon ourselves we've discovered all of these things look at society if that's the case look at the improvements look at the welfare of those who live in society with you how good and how marvellous things are compared to the way they were when man discovered first of all through God's grace that the heart of man was desperately wicked unsearchably so we may deny

[67 : 26] God but that is one sign of the wickedness that is in our heart it's one sign of the darkness and the evil that exists anything you can't say that it is good if it says that God is not you can't say that it is good if it says that God is not that he's not there that he's no God perhaps our response is to do what the Bible encourages us to do break up our fallow ground remember how Jesus taught in parables and he taught about the seed of the gospel that was sown and how it fell on all kinds of ground and the ground at times was hard it was trodden like rock it was trodden by the feet of men so that this seed sat down on the ground and birds of the air plucked it out it's so simple an illustration of how the environment in which we live often resists or results in the resistance of God's word and if we understand that that is what is happening if we have some indication that something is wrong that prevents us frustrates us from accepting the word of God for ourselves then we must ask the question what is it that is wrong why am I not believing why if it is so easy some say to believe that I don't believe is what

I'm asked to believe wrong is it what I'm asked to believe is it against me is it something that will cost me something more than I'm willing to pay well what we need is God's help so that the word that is preached and proclaimed will find a place and that's what the scribe was to do to seek the law of the Lord in whatever way that was going to take him and to do it he says to do it not enough for you to know what the Bible is saying I've met many people and their knowledge of the Bible would surprise you as it surprises me they have a grasp of what the Bible is saying they have a grasp of what the words of scripture are the memory the powerful memory has imbibed the truth but they've not learned to do what the truth tells them to do the apostle

James tells us that we are to be doers of the world not hearers only and this is what it says we are to seek God's word in order to discover the situation of our heart and to apply that word for our good for our eternal benefit to do it to hear what Jesus is telling us in his word to hear the gospel to understand the gospel to apply the gospel meaningfully purposefully across every area of our life as Christians and as those who would wish to be Christian believers final thing we have here is in the context historically the scribe was going back to a place with people who were going back he wasn't but he was taught I'm sure he was given the history of the temple and the worship of

God and he understood all of these things and he has given encouragement to go back so that what he had to do was establish Israel's statutes and commandments teach others what God's laws were how to worship and the way God meant them to worship the sacrifices that they had to offer the holy days that they had to keep the feasts and the festivals that they were commanded and required to observe many of which had fallen by the wayside some had been corrupted and people were happy to pay lip service to them but this was what he wanted to do and this was what he was commanded to do but we are taught and we teach others that formalism is but one step away from atheism we may be content with doing and doing simply outwardly what needs to be done in the heart and from the heart and if we have not prepared our heart all of our activities that we consider to be religious and that we would number as those that give us brownie points before God if any such thing is possible that we've applied ourselves to them but if it is not from a heart that is

God prepared if it is not from a heart that God has broken if it is not from a heart that understands the necessity of knowing the salvation that God has provided in his son then we have a problem we are to build upon a rock and that rock is a living rock and we are to be living rocks building upon the rock our life is the life that testifies to the living relationship that we as Christians have with God is that the kind of life that you live you are living epistle read of all men telling about this union with Christ that you have and this dependence upon him that is yours and this is how the scribe was to live his life as someone who had experienced this for himself and someone whose role it was to teach others how to live their lives in the same way for the glory of

[74 : 00] God and for the good of their soul and it's hard nobody said it wasn't hard it's difficult nobody said it wasn't difficult but nobody said that God's help is not available to us this man was sent back to do an onerous task go to a place that he wasn't familiar with carry out activities that he knew in his head what they were but to actually do them and fulfill them required God to help him through it and this is true about the Christian life also you're going if you're an unbeliever going to the life of a believer you're entering what is for you unexplored territory and you are a pilgrim in that but with God's help what you do is you go on with him and he goes on with you and may

God encourage you to do that let us pray oh Lord oh God we give thanks that you speak to us through the activity of your own Holy Spirit how in the miraculous way in which he worked in the lives of those kings of old who were strangers to grace and to God and yet who were channels of God's grace and who provided a way of return for an apostate people we give thanks for the provision that you make for us in Christ to return to yourself and discover your grace as you save sinners through him bless us in his name cleanse us every sin amen our closing psalm is psalm 138 we sing verses 1 to 4 psalm 138 thee will I praise with all my heart

I will sing praise to thee before the gods and worship will toward thy sanctuary I'll praise thy name even for thy truth and kindness of thy love for thou thy word has magnified all thy great name above thou didst me answer in the day when I to thee did cry and thou my fainting soul with strength did strengthen inwardly all kings upon the earth that are shall give thee praise oh lord when as they from thy mouth shall hear thy true and faithful word these verses thee will I praise with all my heart I will sing praise to thee thee will I praise with all my heart I will sing praise to thee before the gods and worship will toward thy sanctuary

I'll praise thy name in for thy truth and kindness of thy love for thy thy word has magnified all thy great name heaven thou didst me answer in the day when I hear thee did cry and thou my fainting soul his strength is strengthened inwardly all kings upon the earth that I shall give thee praise oh lord when I say from thy mercy shall hear thy trip and faithful word now may praise mercy and peace from God the Father the Son and the Holy

Spirit rest and abide with you all now and always amen