

## **AUTHENTIC TEACHING**

### **Ezra 7:10**

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

As I outlined in detail last week, the history of the Jewish people is bracketed by bondage. Their early existence as a race began in slavery in Egypt and the latter days of Old Testament history included bondage in Babylon.

Almost fifty years after the Babylonians had conquered the Jews, the Babylonians, too, were conquered...by the Persians under King Cyrus. The Jews were still captives but they were captives under a different captor. Who knew what kind of ruler Cyrus would be? Who could foresee how he would treat the Jews. Who could know if the Jews would fare better or worse under Cyrus? God could know. And God did know. And it was God's will that brought Cyrus to power and placed him in a position to control the destiny of the Jews.

Cyrus instituted a new policy toward the nations that had been overrun by the Babylonians. His policy was to allow these nations to return home and begin to resettle and rebuild their lands. Archaeologists have discovered a clay cylinder (called the Cyrus Cylinder), which describes this policy.

The Jews became beneficiaries of that new policy. In 536 B.C., Cyrus sent the first wave of Jewish settlers back to Israel...after fifty years of captivity. These first Jewish settlers returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah.

Think of it, after fifty years of captivity in Babylon, they were permitted to return home. But for most, "home" was a place they'd never been.

Twenty years later, another company of Jewish exiles left Babylon and returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra. Ezra was a scribe. That is, he was a scholar and an expert in the Jewish Law and he was the one King Cyrus chose to be the governor of the fledgling nation that was forming after seventy long years of captivity and exile.

What a job that would have been! Not a single person would have remained alive who had been an adult when the Jews were taken into captivity. Not a single person had any experience in government or national leadership. Not a single person would have had experience in freedom or self-rule. Ezra's job was going to be a big one!

Where do you start to rebuild a nation? How do you begin to transform a generation? Are these not questions we might well ask today? Perhaps we can get some answers from the example of Ezra.

Where did Ezra begin? He began with himself. Ezra set for himself a worthy goal. Ezra 7:9-10 reads:

<sup>8</sup> *Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king.* <sup>9</sup> *He had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, for the gracious hand of his God was on him.* <sup>10</sup> *For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.*

Verse 10 highlights Ezra's worthy goals:

1. He devoted himself to study the Law of the Lord
2. He devoted himself to observe the Law of the Lord
3. And he devoted himself to teach the Law of the Lord

## I. EZRA DEVOTED HIMSELF TO STUDY THE LAW OF THE LORD

When a nation needs reform, it can come from various sources.

- Reform can begin at the grass-roots level with the populace.
- Reform can begin at the top with the leaders.
- Reform can begin at the foundation with new legislation.
- But Ezra began with himself.

The text says that Ezra devoted himself to the study of the Law of the Lord.

As a scribe, don't you know that Ezra was already an expert on the Law of the Lord? He had spent a lifetime studying the Law. But now he had new motivation for his study. He was the new governor of the rebuilt nation of Israel. He was going to have to lead these people in reestablishing a country, reestablishing laws, reestablishing culture and religion. He seems to have felt unequal to the task. So he set himself to study the Law of the Lord.

Most of us, at one time or another, have resolved that we, too, will become students of God's Word. And most of us have failed to keep that resolution. There are numerous reasons why.

1. Perhaps it is **a matter of preparation**. Maybe we didn't get a translation of the Bible that is in language we can understand. Many of us cut our teeth on the King James Version of the Bible. That translation was made in 1611. In its day and for its time, it was a great translation and a giant leap forward from previous versions of the Bible. But the English language has changed a lot since 1611. Most of us don't read a lot of Shakespeare for sheer pleasure. And he was a contemporary with King James and the King James Version of the Bible. If you are having trouble reading and studying the Bible, let me urge you to get a more contemporary

translation of the Scriptures that you can understand without a lot of struggle. And if you want help locating and selecting one, contact me and I'll be glad to assist you.

2. Perhaps what has kept you from becoming a student of God's Word is ***a matter of perspective***. Maybe you didn't realize that this is not so much a book as it is a library of books. Most books, you read by opening the cover and beginning at the first page and reading to the last page. But the Bible is not a book as much as it is a library of books. And, as is typical in a library, the books are arranged within the library according to the subject matter or the type of literature. In the Bible, all of the books of law are grouped together. All of the books of history are grouped together. All the books of poetry are grouped together. All of the books of prophecy are grouped together. The biographies are all in one place. The epistles or the letters are in one place. Because of that, you cannot begin with page one of the Bible and read to the last page and expect the story to flow naturally. Maybe you didn't have that perspective.
3. Perhaps what has hindered your study of God's Word is ***a matter of priority***. Maybe you have wanted to be a student of God's Word but you've not wanted that as much as you have wanted to work overtime, or pursue your hobbies, or watch TV or do any of a dozen other things you've wanted to do. Someone has said that the Bible is the kind of book that once you put it down you hate to pick it up. You will not become a student of God's Word by accident. It will only happen when it becomes a deliberate choice and a top priority.

Ezra sparked a reform in his country because he devoted himself to study the Law of the Lord.

## II. EZRA DEVOTED HIMSELF TO OBEY THE LAW OF THE LORD

Ezra fostered reform in the land because he devoted himself to obey the Law of the Lord. In that respect, Ezra was the ideal teacher. A teacher who does not live what he teaches isn't much of a teacher. Ezra wanted to know the law of God and to demonstrate it in his life. He knew that good information was not sufficient in itself. He knew that good intentions were not sufficient in themselves. He resolved that he would study the Law of the Lord and he would live it.

There has been a lot of talk about change, lately. Change is an inevitable fact of life. Where we are now, we cannot remain. As we are now, we cannot continue. Change occurs.

Not all change is good and not all change is bad. When circumstances change, sometimes things get better and sometimes things get worse. It all depends.

Most of us would agree that our world needs change. For the church to be an effective agent of change in the world, we cannot merely teach the Law of the Lord, we must live the Law of the Lord.

Now, don't forget: the church is the people. The church is you. So what I am saying is that you must live God's truth if we want people to accept what we have to say about God's truth. I must demonstrate God's Word in my life if I want people to hear what I have to say about God's Word. Like Ezra, we must devote ourselves to the study of the Law of the Lord **and** the observance of the Law of the Lord.

### III. **EZRA DEVOTED HIMSELF TO TEACH THE LAW OF THE LORD**

Then, and only then, Ezra devoted himself to teach the Law of the Lord.

Having studied the Law so that he knew it thoroughly, having demonstrated it in his own life, Ezra now sought to teach God's Law to His people.

Nehemiah 8 records the account of what Ezra did to teach God's Word to the people. He assembled the people in the town square and read God's Word to them from daybreak until noon and then he sent the people home to eat lunch. He did this for seven days! For seven days, from daybreak until noon, the people stood while Ezra read God's Word to them. Can you imagine?!?

Ezra did not try to be eloquent, humorous or popular. He just sought to teach God's Word. He read it just as it was, without human opinion or private interpretation. And he read it fearlessly even though it convicted him as much as it did the rest of the people.

Psalm 19:7 reads, "*The Law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.*" But God's Law cannot benefit those who do not know it. People must be told what God's will is.

And people must be taught what God's will is. This teaching involves explaining what may not at first be understood. It involves applying what we have been told. It may involve persuading people to do what they have learned to be God's will.

Teaching the Law of the Lord is still a major task of the people of God.

That is why we have Sunday School, every Sunday for all ages. We understand that no one ever comes to the place in his Christian life where he knows everything God's Word has to say to him. And no one ever comes to the place in his Christian walk where he has applied everything he has learned from God's Word. Our Sunday School meets at 9:00 a.m. each Sunday and we have a place for you. For the adults, we have three classes. Elinor Staser teaches a ladies' class called the Willing Workers. Sandy Brandon teaches an adult class of men and women and her class is called the New Life Class. Both of these classes study the International Sunday School Lesson from Standard Publishing Company. Notes for this lesson are printed in student quarterlies distributed to the classes. Notes are also printed in THE LOOKOUT magazine each week.

I, too, teach an adult class and our curriculum has changed over the last year. Currently, the class discusses what I will be preaching the following week and they help to shape the direction and the content of the sermons.

You would be welcome in any of these classes and I can assure you that you would benefit from any of them. Please join us next Sunday.

In addition to our Sunday School for all ages, we have an adult Bible Study on Wednesday evenings at 7:00 p.m. We have been studying the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm by using a book by Max Lucado: *Traveling Light*. This is an informal time of Bible Study during which people can ask questions and offer their insights on God's Word as we learn from one another. You will not be called upon to read or to speak but you can if you want to. If you try our Wednesday evening Bible study for three weeks, I think you'll be hooked. Most people really enjoy it and they learn a lot from one another.

Neither our Sunday School nor our Wednesday evening Bible study are ends unto themselves, however. They are to equip us so we can then teach others. As we are learning God's Word, we are then equipped to share it with those who have not heard.

Quite often, the teaching opportunities that come to us come in the form of the questions we are asked by friends and neighbors who know us and who observe our lives. I Peter 3:15 urges us, "*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.*" The teaching ministry of Clay City Christian Church will help equip you to have hope and to be able to give everyone who asks, a reason for the hope that you have.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

The English writer, H.G. Wells said, "*the future of civilization depends on the outcome of a race between education and catastrophe.*" Scripture says that the future of every person depends on the outcome of a race

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between Christian education and eternity. We must work to get God's Word to everyone before they pass in to eternity.

The church has a teaching ministry to fulfill. Our friends, our family and our neighbors desperately need a word from God and that Word has been entrusted to us. But they will not be able to hear the Word from us until they see the Word in us. Will you rise to the challenge, as Ezra did,  
TO STUDY

TO OBEY

AND TO TEACH THE LAW OF THE LORD?

**INVITATION:** #406 – *“Wonderful Words of Life”*