

“Such As I Am”

Paul, in his reply to king Agrippa, expressed the desire that all who heard him might "become such as I am." Paul was a dedicated Christian. He wanted others to be the same. Would you want others to be "such as you are?" What if every member of this congregation was just as dedicated as you are? What if every member put forth just the same amount of effort as you do? What if every member showed the same dedication to teaching others that you do? What if every member gave to the work as you do? Would this congregation be stronger or weaker if such were the case? Each and every one of us should so live that we would desire others to be "such as I am."

- by James Hahn

Joint Efforts Result in Conversion

Naaman was captain of the Syrian army, a war hero. He was also a leper. His story is told in 2 Kings 5.

In Naaman's day Syria made frequent border raids against Israel. During one of those raids a young maiden was taken captive who later became Naaman's wife's servant. She told her mistress about the prophet Elisha, whom she was sure could cure Naaman's leprosy.

Leprosy was among the most dreaded diseases in Bible times. It begins with brownish-red spots on the skin which turn into hardened nodules, and in time become ulcers. As the disease progresses the muscles and nerves are affected, resulting in deformity and paralysis. Naturally, one with leprosy would seize any opportunity to be healed. Naaman was no exception. Laden with extravagant gifts, he proceeded to Elisha's house, thinking the prophet would come out to him and ceremoniously cleanse him. Instead Elisha sent a messenger to him, instructing him to go wash in the Jordan seven times.

Naaman reacted angrily. This procedure was illogical and humiliating. He might have returned home without complying had not his servants intervened. They wisely pointed out to him that he was prepared to do some great thing to be healed, so why not do something as simple as dipping himself in a river? Naaman reconsidered, obeyed, and his flesh was restored to a childlike purity.

This account illustrates several important lessons and is an oft-used sermon text. I want to make just one point from it: Naaman's cleansing resulted from the combined efforts of several people. The Israelite maiden initiated the process by telling him help was available through Elisha. Then Elisha, through a messenger, told Naaman what God required of him. Finally his own servants played the vital role of encouraging him to obey when he resisted. Each of these contributions was equally essential to Naaman's cleansing. Without any of them he would have gone to his grave a leper.

Those lost in sin need to be washed in Jesus' blood. Every effort at helping them is valuable; none should be demeaned. And there is something you can do. Some are like Elisha, who can effectively explain what God requires. Perhaps more of us are capable of this phase than we realize. But if you cannot be an Elisha you can be an Israelite maiden, telling others that cleansing is available and putting them in contact with an Elisha. Or maybe you are a good Naaman's servant, encouraging others to do what they know is right. Barnabas was a "Son of Encouragement"; we need more like him. Some plant, others water. These efforts come together, and God gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6).

Friend, every effort, whether large or small, counts. Your own conversion was likely the culmination of combined efforts of people who loved your soul. Now do what you can, unto God's glory.

- by Frank Himmel

A Prepared Heart

"Ezra the son of Seraiah . . . the son of Aaron the chief priest . . . went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses . . . 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" (Ezra 1:1-10).

"So king Rehoboam . . . did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord" (II Chronicles 12:13,14).

What a contrast between Ezra and Rehoboam. Ezra was helpful in teaching Israel the law; Rehoboam was instrumental in the cause of division among the tribes. What a difference preparation of the heart made. May we suggest some things that may have contributed to the preparation of Ezra's heart?

(1) **The influence of godly parents.** Ezra's father was a priest and possibly one who taught the law. The influence of such a man could tend to lead his children to God. Blessed are the children of the righteous.

(2) **Seeing the consequences of disobedience.** Ezra had been in captivity and saw firsthand the results of disobedience. This could well have had a part in helping him to see how much better it is to please God.

(3) **Moral uprightness.** Consider what it did for Joseph, David, and Esther. "Remember thy creator in... thy youth" (Eccl. 12:1).

(4) **Purity of mind.** "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

(5) **Ezra's knowledge** of the law, Israel's history, and the promises made to Abraham, Moses, and David could motivate him to please God. Also, Ezra may have known of Daniel, who would have been a good role model.

How well have we prepared our heart to seek the law of God, to do it, and teach it to others?

- by **Glenn Melton**

Words of Encouragement

Occasionally we all need to hear a word of encouragement. There is no better source for this sort of help than God's inspired word. If you need a spiritual boost, meditate on some of these passages:

-- *"Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice ... Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:4-7).*

- *"I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20).*

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

- *"In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:37-39).*

- *"... We may boldly say, 'The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me'" (Heb. 13:6).*

- *"I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Ps. 37:25).*

You can, no doubt, think of many other passages that offer similar encouragement. The point is, that God cares for us as His children. We should rejoice in that fact!

- by *Greg Gwin*