**Prepare Your Heart for the Lord**

*1 Samuel 7:3*

**Introduction**

1. After being defeated by the Philistines, and having the ark of the covenant captured, and eventually returned to Kirjath Jearim, the Philistines still having the upper hand over Israel, Israel lamented before the Lord (**cf. 1 Samuel 7:2**). (*Implied is a sense of sorrow which indicated a desire to repent to gain the favor of the Lord again.*) 🡪
2. Samuel saw their penitence and took the time to instruct them on what would be required of them to return to a form pleasing before God to be delivered **(v. 3).**
   1. Return to the Lord with all your heart.
   2. Repent from your idolatrous ways. (Put away the false gods.)
   3. ***“and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only”***
   4. **THEN GOD WILL FINALLY DELIVER YOU FROM THE HAND OF THE PHILISTINES.**
3. They needed to prepare their hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only:
   1. ***“and direct your hearts to the Lord and serve Him alone” (NASB)***.
   2. “to direct the heart firmly: see **Psa 78:8**” (Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament; 1 Samuel 7:3). (**cf. Psalm 78:5-8** – *The previous generation did not have their hearts set toward pleasing God. Their spirits were far from Him, and they were not concerned with living righteously before Him.*)
   3. **To prepare our hearts for the Lord is to direct them wholly to His service, and as such, make any preparations necessary to always and immediately carry out His will.**
4. We need to understand the importance of preparing our hearts for the Lord, and how to do it. 🡪
5. Prepared and Unprepared Hearts
6. Prepared Hearts (Examples)
   1. **Daniel** – After God gave Judah into the hands of the Babylonians, Nebuchadnezzar brought some Israelites to Babylon for training to serve the king – Daniel and his friends (Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah).
      1. **(1:5)** – They were to train, and then serve before the king – to eat delicacies, and wine from the king.
      2. **(1:8)** – Daniel purposed in his heart not to defile himself. (*Another way of saying it is that he prepared his heart for the Lord, not to defile himself.*)
         1. It is likely that the meats did not satisfy the diet required of the Jews by God – unclean meats.
         2. Also, likely that the meat and wine was dedicated to false Gods, and thus Daniel wished to avoid partaking of it.
      3. **(1:8b-10)** – The first request was not sufficient.
      4. **(1:11-14)** – Daniel was persistent.
      5. **This attitude of preparation for service to God which Daniel possessed was something he kept throughout his life. 🡪**
      6. **(6:10)** – After Darius signed the decree that anyone who petitions any God or man for thirty days would be put in the den of lions.
      7. **Why was Daniel able to remain loyal to God under such circumstances? He prepared his heart for the Lord!**
   2. **Ezra** – Ezra was one who had favor from the Lord. (**cf. Ezra 7:9; v. 28b** – *after receiving the letter from king Artaxerxes.*)
      1. **Ezra 7:10** – Ezra prepared his heart to not only seek the Law of the Lord, but to do what it says, and teach it to others.
      2. **He directed his heart toward the acquisition of the knowledge of God, to do what was pleasing to Him.**
      3. He made it his life’s purpose to find out what God wanted, and then to do it.
   3. This is the kind of prepared hearts we need.
7. Unprepared Hearts (Examples)
   1. **Rehoboam** – He did evil because his heart was not prepared for the Lord.
      1. **2 Chronicles 12:13-14** – Why did Rehoboam do evil? He did not make the necessary preparations to work righteousness.
      2. **2 Chronicles 10:3-8, 13-14** – He did not listen to the wise, for he did not wish to do what was right in the first place. **(This caused the kingdom to divide** – **v. 19**)
      3. **Consider his family ties** – His father was Solomon, the wisest man to ever live. His grandfather was David – ***“a man after [God’s] own heart” (Acts 13:22).***
      4. **Despite the lineage from which he came, and the resources available to him, Reheboam DID EVIL.**
      5. **It was up to him to make the necessary preparations, but he did not.**
      6. **Family cannot make one righteous.** *(Of course, they can be an influence, but the decision is individual. Relationships with God are on an individual level.)* ***(“The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself” Ezekiel 18:20*).**
   2. **Parable of the Sower** – A description of the recipients of the preaching of the gospel. (*Not all will obey, and not all who obey will endure.*)
      1. **Matthew 13:18-23 – Jesus’ explanation of the parable.**
         1. **(vv18-19)** – does not understand (*Not the fault of the proclaimer, but of the hearer’s hard heart*.) (NOTE: ***“sown in his heart”*** – soil = heart. **Need for heart preparation**.)
         2. **(vv. 20-21) – did not have root in himself. (***Did not give time to further growth, and therefore was not as dedicated as he should have been.)* **(Was not prepared to endure persecution for Christ.)**
         3. **(v. 22) – did not value spiritual things above material things. (***Did not prepare his heart to long for the most important matters.)*
         4. **(v. 23) – Understands it because he wanted to know the truth, and bears fruit because he wants to please God, and get to heaven. (***This is due to his preparedness of heart to do what the word says!)*
8. **We have noted examples of prepared hearts, and unprepared hearts to the Lord. Hearts prepared for the Lord always find themselves obeying and pleasing God, while unprepared hearts always lead to that which is evil. How do we prepare our hearts for the Lord? 🡪**
9. Prepare Your Heart for the Lord

**First Note: The preparation of the heart for the Lord is a daily activity. Because of the sudden shifts in life, and the constant prowl of the devil, we must constantly be preparing ourselves.**

1. Prayer
   1. ***“pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).***
   2. **A constancy in prayer shows that one is ever focused on God, and is therefore preparing himself for Him.** – *Prayer is the avenue of communication from man to God – prayers ascend to the throne of God* – ***“golden bowls of incense, which are the prayers of the saints” (Revelation 5:8).***
   3. **Conversely, the one who is not constant in prayer shows himself to be distracted with other things.**
   4. **Acts 1:4, 12-13a, 14** – The apostles were told to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, and they prayed while waiting.
      1. A big day was coming when they would be given the HS, and the kingdom would be established.
      2. **They were to be witnesses of Jesus to the world! The task was great, and they needed preparation for it – a focus of mind on the things at hand.**
   5. **James 1:5** – Prayer is also important because without it we cannot receive the things we need from the Father.
      1. ***“You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask” (4:2)***.
      2. ***“Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving” (Colossians 4:2)*** *– we must be WATCHFUL in prayer, watching for opportunities to pray, and for things we need to pray for, and for opportunities to carry out God’s will as an answer to our prayers.*
   6. **The Christian who is not constant in prayer cannot possibly have his heart prepared for the Lord.**
2. Study
   1. **Psalm 1** – This shows how NOT to prepare, and the PROPER way to prepare our hearts for the Lord.
      1. The sentiment of this Psalm is seen in the contrast of Ezra and Rehoboam.
      2. **Ezra consulted God’s word, and gave time to knowing it. While Rehoboam consulted his peers – the ungodly, sinful, and scornful.**
   2. ***“O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23).*** ***(To prepare ourselves for walking aright we must turn to God’s instruction***.) 🡪
   3. **Psalm 119:9-16** – This speaks of a man who has a desire to please God, and knows how to prepare himself for all things.
   4. The man who does not study is a man who will not be able to ***“discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14)***, and who is like a child ***“tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14***).
   5. **The only way to be prepared to do God’s will in everything is to study and know God’s will!**
3. Introspection
   1. A prepared heart for the Lord is one that is constantly looking inward with brutal honesty in comparing himself with the truth. What needs improving, and correcting?
   2. ***“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves” (2 Corinthians 13:5a).***
   3. **James 1:21-25** – God’s word is designed for pairing with introspection.
      1. **(v. 21)** – Do you have filthiness and wickedness? Get rid of it. Do you have the proper predisposition to receive God’s word? – Meekness.
      2. **(vv. 22-25)** – Do you look into the mirror of God’s word to see if anything is missing? When you find a problem do you fix it?
   4. A heart prepared for the Lord is a heart constantly searching itself to find what is lacking, and what needs to be eliminated – ***“Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22)***.

**Conclusion**

1. The ability for us to do what is right in God’s sight depends upon the preparation of our hearts for the Lord.
2. If we do not have hearts prepared for the Lord, we will do evil!
3. **Have you taken, and are you continually taking the necessary steps to prepare your heart for the Lord?**