



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

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JUMP START #278

Daniel 1:8- “But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the King’s choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself.”

The book of Daniel—the last of the major prophets and the book that gave us the story of three Jewish boys in the fiery furnace and Daniel in the lion’s den. As a child in Bible classes, the book of Daniel was exciting, especially for boys who like to get on the floor and fight the lions, even though that never happened in the story.

Let’s fill in some background information about the book. The book takes place in the 500’s B.C. The nation of Judah has ignored the prophet that God has sent. They are bent on worshipping idols and doing what they want to do. God warns, the nation ignores. God says enough and sends the Babylonian armies to punish Judah. It is destructive and devastating. The walls around Jerusalem are smashed. The temple is ransacked and burned. Many are killed. The best of the young are carried off to Babylon. They are given Babylonian names and taught Babylonian ways. This punishment lasts for 70 years, a generation. After that, a new nation takes over and some from Judah are allowed to return. The walls are rebuilt and a new temple is built. This is where the Old Testament ends.

Bible history is fascinating. Don’t be afraid of it, or ignore it. There are lessons. Understanding it is key to understanding the message of the Bible. Often ideas we have are not true historically. For instance, it is generally thought that Daniel was a teen-ager in the lion’s den. Not so. He was captured as a young man by the Babylonians in Chapter 1. Seventy years pass, a new nation takes over in chapter 5. It is in chapter 6 that Daniel winds up in the lion’s den. Daniel is in his 80’s at least. Now that’s a little different than the images we see drawn for Vacation Bible School and other places.

Our verse today takes place soon after Daniel is taken to Babylon. He is a youth. He has been captured. He is not treated as a prisoner. The Babylonians are trying to turn the Jewish youths into Babylonians. Away from home, in a different land with different customs and not wanting to be there make all the ingredients for someone to be rebellious to God. The Jews have laws about foods. Certain foods were considered “unclean.” But Daniel is away from home. He doesn’t have a choice. Yes, he does.

The passage says that “Daniel made up his mind ahead of time.” I wish I could do that. I wish I did that more. That means, first of all, Daniel knew what was right and what God wanted him to do—even away from home. College is a wonderful time to shine for God or to act like an idiot and do all the things you

would never, ever do when at home. There is an abundance of alcohol floating around college campuses, even the “Christian” colleges. Why? Students have made up their minds or else they have made the wrong choice. Away from home, without any guidance, it’s see how stupid you can become. And many do. Wasting opportunity, tons of money, and getting themselves in trouble with the law but more so, starting a dangerous and addictive path away from God.

Daniel made up his mind. Even though he was away from home. Even though no one may ever know. Even though he wasn’t in the position to do much about it. He knew what God expected. He was old enough to know what he should do. God was counting on him and he wasn’t going to let God down, even away from home.

Imagine, this morning, before you get your day going, you, like Daniel, were to “set your mind.” Imagine saying, “today, I will not tell a lie. Period.” Now as soon as you say that, you will be challenged. Something will happen. Will you keep that promise? Imagine saying, “Today, I will not take God’s name in vain.” Or, “I will not look at pornography.” Or, “I will not have a sorry attitude.” Or, “I will not talk mean about others.” Even at work. Even on a road trip. Even in a text message. Even in the dorm. Or, the positive side, “I will thank my God for giving me another day.” Or, “I will read one chapter of the Bible today.” Or, “I will tell one person about Jesus.” But it’s not Sunday? But I have a lot to do today. Make up your mind ahead of time.

When we don’t make up our minds ahead of time, we are forced to act upon the moment. We become “reactionary.” At those moments, we generally choose what is easiest, safest, and hurts the least—and often, not what is best. Standing for what is right can get you in trouble. It did for Daniel later on. That’s why he was in the lion’s den. And that’s why the Jewish boys were in the fiery furnace. There are some things that just ought to be settled in the mind and heart of a disciple. For instance, church services shouldn’t be determined by looking out the window and seeing if it’s a nice day or not. Doesn’t matter. I made up my mind ahead of time. Living righteously, is something that a disciple makes up their mind to do ahead of time. Keeping our promises, first to God, then to your mate, then your family, then your church. You make up your mind to do those things.

I have found, living this way makes things a lot easier. I already know what I’m going to do. It’s not always easy. I have found that it keeps me out of trouble as well. In making up my mind ahead of time, I say some prayers. That helps me and strengthens me. It seems when your mind is made up ahead of time, you walk with a sense of purpose and determination. You tend to see the big picture in life.

Got your mind made up yet? Daniel did. Give it a try today. Stay with it. Think about it. You might find this a great way to start everyday.....making up your mind for God.

Roger Shouse