



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 #547

John 10:10- “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

This section of Scripture describes Jesus as a shepherd, and not just any shepherd, but the good shepherd. He knows the sheep by name and the sheep recognize his voice. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. In contrast, the thief only takes for himself, and leaves things a mess.

The thief? Obviously, Satan fits in that picture easily. He does nothing that is good. He does not add value. He takes. He destroys. He kills. That’s Satan. Others might fit into that mold as well, such as the false teachers and even some of the Pharisees, that were squeezing life out of those who wanted to come to God. Their many man- made rules made life unbearable and they made the journey to God extreme and difficult.

Jesus came to give life. What a contrast here. He gave his life, so we could have life. A life was lost so a life could be found. He didn’t just restore life, He gave it abundantly. To the fullest. The good life is found in Jesus.

When does this life start? At first, we’d think of Heaven. We sing, “Won’t it be wonderful there....” And it will be. These last few days have taken me to the home of one of our members. His life is nearly over. The dear family gathers and waits. It’s touching and sad. I have been at similar scenes often. Some day, in Heaven, there will be no tears, no death, no sorrow. Indeed, it will be wonderful there. There with the righteous. There and never having to be somewhere else. The end of the journey. The final destination. Home and never again having to leave. Those are great thoughts to me.

However, I think Jesus intended for the disciples to understand between here and Heaven, there is an abundant life. It can be found here. It can be now, while we are on earth. I don’t think we grasp that enough. The image I get from some it that it is hard being a Christian, nearly terrible, but if we can only hold on, we’ll eventually get to Heaven. The dreariness and the difficulty they feel drains all life and energy out of them. They enter church buildings not with a smile because they get to worship God, but with a frown because life is so hard.

I don’t get that picture from the New Testament. I don’t get that from this passage. The abundant life is now. It’s a fantastic life because it’s filled with grace and hope and promises and future and fellowship with God. He doesn’t just allow us to work in his kingdom, but he works with us and through us. He trusts us enough to be part of something eternal. I wouldn’t be shocked at all if God, like a parent with a child in a glass shop, would say, “Look, but do not touch one thing.” God doesn’t do that. He entrusts His

perfect word, about his perfect Son to imperfect preachers, like myself. He allows former sinners of all types, to lead his people and to develop the kingdom.

The abundant life. It's filled with joy and peace and confidence. We don't know about tomorrow, but God does. I hold God's hand, that's all I need. The abundant life is lived without the shallow and superficial and artificial and temporary things such as materialism, greed, pride, selfishness, or putting others down. We want everyone to have what we have. I don't have to be rich in money to be rich in God. I don't have to be well read, well travelled, or well educated to have this meaningful, full life. Some of the best people I have ever met were common, content and generous because of Jesus Christ. They lived in simple homes. They didn't eat the fancy stuff. They didn't feel neglected because they never went to Europe, sky dived, or had a degree from a university. Many would look at their life proclaim that it was boring. Not these folks. They didn't need "things" to make them fulfilled and satisfied. They never kept a bucket list, because if a person dies without doing the bucket things, someone will think what a disappointment. Not to those living abundantly in Jesus. They have found what they were looking for, it's Jesus. The look is over.

The life with Jesus is great. What a joy it is to worship God. Passion, energy, and a wealth of love and fellowship abound when those with the abundant life worship. Others are looking for something, they don't know what. They try changing this, changing that, changing churches, changing mates, changing cars, changing houses, changing jobs, always changing, and never realizing the abundant life, the good life, is found in Jesus.

Jesus changes us. We become holy when we walk with Jesus. It's hard not to, because He was so holy. We become mindful of Heaven when we walk with Jesus. It's where we are going. We become generous when we walk with Jesus. That's the way he is with us. We become thoughtful of others when we walk with Jesus, that's the way he is to us.

The abundant life is not defined by never having to go to work, nor having so much money that you could buy whatever you wanted, nor by living in a mansion, nor by hanging out with the celebs, nor by what sporting events you attended, nor by what art hangs on your wall, nor by what cars are housed in your garage---that's the world's definition. It's all phony, shallow and selfish. It's all about what I get for me. It doesn't last. It doesn't do what you think it would, nor does it give that lasting abundant life.

Jesus came and gave life. It begins with forgiveness and it continues as we walk and journey with Jesus. I am a friend of Jesus, what else matters? I am a child of God. The promise of God is that he is always with me. I can talk to God anytime. I can read, learn and know his heart, his will and his law, the Bible. I can live satisfied, contented, and in peace because of Jesus. The riches are within and can never be taken away, as long as we continue with Jesus.

Abundantly. Not just a little bit. Not just a spoonful. Not even half full. Abundantly. David said, "Surely my cup overflows...." It's now. It's here. It's what Jesus gave. It's life!!!!

Roger Shouse

