



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 #263

1 Sam. 14:24- *“ Now the men of Israel were hard pressed on that day, for Saul had put the people under oath, saying, ‘Cursed be the man who eats food before evening, and until I have avenged myself on my enemies.’ So none of the people tasted food.”*

It’s difficult being a leader—whether it’s in politics, the church, a company, or even as a dad at home. Leaders are supposed to lead. They are examples and through their influence people are supposed to follow them. Part of being a leader is making decisions that are best for the people. Those decisions may not be popular, but they are necessary. Then there are the times, when leaders make a decision that is just plain bad. That is what we find here with King Saul.

Israel is fighting the Philistines. The people are scared. God is leading them to victory, against great odds and numbers. Israel is on the advance. Saul doesn’t want to slow down. He makes the armies take a vow of fasting. They will not eat until complete victory. I expect what Saul was thinking was that this would motivate them to move faster and fight harder. Parents may say, “ No play time until your homework is done.” Yet, the difference is that we are talking about war not homework. The troops are fighting hand to hand combat, they are marching. Physically, they are at the end. Without food, there is no energy to keep them going. Three things happen.

First, Jonathon, Saul’s son, and head of the armies, didn’t hear about the oath. He ate. Now, there’s a problem. The number one commander disobeyed. Secondly, Jonathon complains about his father and states that, ‘He has troubled the land.’ We remember, not too long ago, when one of the top generals complained about the way the President was handling the war. He was fired. When those just under the leader undermine and complain, chaos results. Thirdly, the weary armies find animals after a battle and they ate them nearly raw. The context states, ‘The people ate them with the blood.’ **V32** This was a violation of God’s law. God considers life in the blood and both the Old Testament and the New Testament there are laws against eating blood. (**Lev. 3:17, Acts 15:22-29**)The people are so famished, they don’t care.

Saul makes sacrifices to God for the sin of the people. What a mess! All of this can be attributed to Saul’s oath of not eating. That wasn’t thought out very well. His oath put the people in a state of panic and despair.

So what do we learn from this? First, it’s easy to bark out orders. If a leader doesn’t consider the state of the people under him, rebellion takes place. Think about the people. Companies often don’t do that anymore. They think about profits and bottom lines. They break the spirit and heart of good workers.

Corporate America has developed an atmosphere in which people can be replaced. Overworked, overstressed and layers and layers of managers who bark out senseless rules or make changes that are not necessary, kills the heart of the workers. What happens? People leave. Good workers go elsewhere.

One of the things that impresses me about Jesus coming to earth, is that he didn't stay for a week-end. He wasn't removed from the masses. He lived, he was, he felt what we go through. It would do well for the college president to spend a night, or better, a week-end in the college dorm and eat the food the students eat. It would do well for managers and supervisors to spend some time doing what the workers are doing.

Secondly, leaders must realize when they made a mistake. Some never do. Some will drive a company into the ground, ruin the economy of a nation, watch a church die, or witness the end of their marriage rather than admit they made a bad decision. Part of being a leader is admitting that you were wrong. Apologize. Pride keeps us from doing that. It sits back and watches the nation become weary and then sin because it won't admit the decision was wrong. Parents have to apologize to their kids once in awhile. We say things, often like Saul, without thinking, and it's too harsh, too much for little hearts to handle and they fall apart on the inside. Paul told the Colossians, 'Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart'. (**Col.3:21**)

That expression, 'lose heart,' means to become discouraged. We'd say, 'My heart is not in it.' That's exactly where Israel was. Their heart was gone. That happens at work, at home and at church.

Leading, means keeping the heart of the followers strong. Else what you have is slavery. And that's exactly how so many people feel today----about work, church, family and life.

One final thought, we are all leaders in some degree. It's easy to complain about the leaders above us, but what kind of job are we doing? Don't let it go to your head. Be the leader that actually leads.....all the way to Heaven!

Roger Shouse