



# THE EXHORTER

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

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April 27, 2014

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***Matthew 27:5 “And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.”***

Our verse today shows the sad conclusion to Judas' life. It ended with suicide. A preacher friend of mine had to deal with suicide this week. Someone that he had been trying to help find the Lord, took his life. Years ago, the husband of a church member took his life. I arrived at the house, early in the morning, at about the same time the police did. I led the way to the basement and nearly walked into his lifeless body hanging there. It was very haunting. That scene bothered me for a long time.

We don't talk much about suicide. It's one of those hush-hush things. The person who takes their life leaves the family with questions as to why and his problems often shift to them. I'm not a psychologist, but it seems that there are three main reasons someone takes their life. The first, is because they are trapped and about to be caught. A crime has been committed and the law is closing in. Instead of facing jail, they take their life. A second reason, a person is mentally unbalanced, and has a lot of rage. These are the ones that shoot up a school or mall. They injure or kill other innocent people, saving one last bullet for themselves. Why they must ruin the lives of others is beyond understanding. They take their life so no one really knows what they were thinking. Justice isn't served and many people are ruined for a long time. The third reason some take their life is because they see no hope. They may get that way physically. A terminal disease is going to take their life, so they give up and speed up the process and end their life. Others, after a lifetime of mistakes and failures, feel that everyone has given up on them, including God, take their life because they are tired of the misery.

Our kids, when in high school, had a friend who was a drummer in a band. He came around a few times. He taught my son some drum techniques. One evening he ended his life. It bothered my kids. They knew him.

Our verse today is about Judas. He betrayed Jesus. As Jesus was praying, Judas was rounding up the guards to arrest Jesus. There are some things about Judas that are very revealing. He kept the money that the wealthy women had given to support Jesus. He dipped into that money for himself. That is the polite way of saying that he stole from Jesus. When a woman anointed Jesus with costly

perfume, Judas balked and complained, stating that the poor could have been helped by that money. He may have thought that he too could have been helped by that money if he could only get his hands on it. Judas was the one who approached the chief priests about betraying. A sum of money was agreed upon, the price of a common slave. The deal was struck and Judas waited for the right moment.

Matthew tells us that when he saw that Jesus had been condemned, he felt remorse, returned the money and declared I have betrayed innocent blood. That seems odd to us. Didn't he know that was the very thing he was doing? Wasn't that the plan? Was it? There had been earlier attempts on Jesus' life. Once they tried to stone Him. He escaped. Another time, they tried to throw Jesus off a cliff. He escaped. It seemed like Jesus could get out of every trap. Did Judas think that this would be another time? Did he focus more on the quick and easy money and not the consequences? Each time before, Jesus was threatened by Jews. The Jews were finished with Jesus. They led Him off to Pilate, the Roman official in Jerusalem. Now the situation had escalated. The Romans were involved. They would use their soldiers and their prison. They had their own system of trials. Things had never gotten this serious before. Judas realized that he goofed. He even declared to the priests that Jesus was innocent. Judas never bought into the idea that Jesus was a blasphemer. He knew. He had seen all the miracles. He had seen the compassion and the forgiveness. He had heard the lessons. He, himself, had preached and cast out demons, as directed by Jesus. Jesus was innocent. No question. Judas, Matthew tells us, felt remorse. He was sorry. He would like a do-over. He wanted a mulligan. That wasn't going to happen. Pilate was wanting to climb the political ladder with Rome and putting an end to a Jewish riot was important. Judas messed up big time.

He went out and hung himself. A sorry end to an evil and wicked deed. According to Acts, Judas hung until he rotted. No one wanted the body. The disciples didn't. The Jews didn't. The Romans didn't. He died and no one cared. No flowers at a grave. No tears at a memorial. He became food for wild animals.

It is often taught that suicide is a straight ticket to Hell. Some call it "self-murder," and they reason that since a person died in sin, they will go to Hell. That reasoning is a bit flawed. If not careful, we conclude that our last and final act best be righteous or we all will go to Hell. What if a person said a bad word and then they died? Hell bound because their last act was sinful? That sounds a lot like salvation by works and not grace. It's terrifying to think that in pain, anger or foolishness someone may say or doing something sinful and then have no chance. Where does God's grace fit in, or in suicide cases, do we believe that even God's grace doesn't work? We need to be careful what we are saying.

Does this mean that suicide is not wrong? No. The greatest issue with suicide is giving up on God. It is believing that problems are greater than God. It is giving up on divine help. It is living without God. With God all things are possible. Greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world. Those taking their life give up on those statements. Their life is so sad and tragic that they feel that they can never come back home, especially to God. Giving up on God is the greatest tragedy of suicide.

Also, suicide is flawed thinking, because a person often believes that they will end their misery, escape justice and just be done with it all. Suicide, death itself, never ends it. Our story does not have a "The End" to it. The cemetery is not the end of the journey. God is. The misery of this life is nothing compared to the misery on the other side of death. Here, with God, there is always hope. On the other side, without God, there is no hope. Suicide is based on ending things. It doesn't work. It doesn't end. There is no period to the end of life. The twisted thoughts of those thinking about taking their life never considers what's on the other side of death. We are not animals. We continue to live

after we die. We will face God. Forgiveness is the answer, not taking your life.

This is such a sad subject. Let me add a couple of practical thoughts.

First, when there has been a suicide in a family, don't be nosy. Everyone wants to know why. Was there a note left? How did they do it? Did they talk about it ahead of time? What was the problem? Don't ask those things. The family is ashamed. They are embarrassed. Death by cancer and death by suicide are not the same. We view them differently. They affect us differently. Be sensitive to the family. Don't hold them guilty. They carry enough blame for not seeing things and not doing something. Especially, do not say dumb things like, "Well, we know where he's at." Do you? Only God knows. Don't judge. Remember, the way you judge is the way YOU will be judged.

Second, if someone wants to talk, let them. Don't change the subject. Don't whitewash things. Don't pretend everything is fine, when it is not. This is a time to be a listener. Hugs, tears and compassion is what is needed. The family is grieving as any family would with a death, but more so, because of the way the death came about. Be helpful if you can. Invite God into the conversation. Pray. Those are good things that you can do.

Jesus is hope. That's the message that we need to tell. Desperate and hopeless hearts need to realize that there is hope in Jesus. God can forgive us. God wants us, even when no one else does. Too many teenagers take their lives every year. It's hard to understand when they are so young and life is just beginning. The message, the answer, the hope must be Jesus.

Thanks for letting me share these thoughts on this difficult topic.

Roger Shouse

