



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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Ecclesiastes 7:8 *“The end of a matter is better than its beginning; patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit.”*

We've come to the end of another year. In the morning it will be time to get the new calendars out and start getting used to writing a new year on our checks. A year brings all kinds of experiences, emotions and situations for us. For some, this year was the year they got married. That happened to our son. For others, it was the year a baby was born. That happened to our daughter. Some lost jobs this year. The new year will begin with the search for who is hiring. Many said goodbye to a loved one this year. It's hard to decide whether it was a good year or not. I'm not completely sure if that is something that we ought to decide. There are so many things that happen within a year, both good and bad. A year has ups and downs. There are good moments and happy occasions that we will store in our memories. There are many every day common days, when not much happened. Went to school. Went to work. Nothing really thrilling. Then there are those days that really tug on our hearts and we wonder if we will ever get through them. We do. All years are good in the sense that we are here and we are engaged in life.

Our verse, from Solomon's Ecclesiastes, is found in a section of contrasts. One thing is better than another. What is called better, is not what we'd generally pick. Death doesn't seem better than birth. Mourning doesn't seem better than feasting. And in our verse today, the end doesn't seem better than the beginning.

The beginning has hope and anticipation. The moment before the gifts are opened. The moment before the game starts. The moment before the baby is delivered. The beginning of a new book. The beginning of a movie. On the surface, the end can seem anticlimactic and even sad. You finish a book and you wished there were more pages. You finish a movie and you wish it didn't end. You scrape the bottom of the dessert bowl, not as exciting as when they put that piece of cheesecake topped with whipped cream in front of you.

Solomon has in mind God. Ecclesiastes is about God. Nearly every page mentions God. The end, the completion, keeping God in the picture is better than the beginning. Solomon is not talking about books and movies and cheesecake. He's referring to life. A life completed is better than a life started.

(OVER)

This fits with the theme of the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth. The beginning of life is exciting but filled with uncertainty and concern. What kind of person will this one become? Will they walk with God or ignore God? Will they bless others or be a curse to others? What influences will shape this person? At the end of the journey, when one has completed it with God, it is better. The funeral for a Christian is a reminder and a hope for all of us who are on that journey. The end is better than the beginning. The end has been right, good and helpful. The end means Heaven. The end pleases God. The best is yet to come.

Solomon's words are not intended to be an end of the year reminder. The end Solomon is talking about is life, not a year. Finish strong. Finish well. Finish with God. That's the idea. In that way, the end is better than the beginning. Many start with God, but something happens. Along the way they get sidetracked, discouraged and drop off. They don't finish with God. There's been too many funerals where it is known that the person once worshipped God, a long time ago, but it wasn't that way at the end. They didn't finish. Staying with God is as important to a family and a church, as starting with God. We want folks to come in the front door. But that doesn't do much good if in time they walk out the back door and never come back. Finish with God. The end is better than the beginning.

That very statement tells us that between the beginning and the end, something happened. Something good happened. They got better and better. They became stronger and stronger. They got more and more busy in Kingdom work. Their faith grew. It started like that little mustard seed, but it didn't stay that way. It grew and took over. That faith changed them and changed how they did things. Their outlook changed. Their attitude changed. They became more compassionate and engaged with others. They made a difference.

I believe as one gets older, the thought of making a difference becomes important. I know for me, there was a time when I didn't think much about that. I think I had too much of me in me. Today, that thought drives me all the time. It's not about leaving a name, a legacy or anything like that. It's not trying to be the best or the one on top. It's about helping people. It's about making a real difference in their lives. It's helping them see God and reach for Heaven. It's about pulling marriages out of the ditch. It's about seeing people beat addictions. It's about families welcoming home prodigals. It's about making churches stronger and better. It's about helping leaders shepherd God's people. It's opening our eyes to see that today it is possible to make a difference globally. Making a difference.

Our passage also reminds us of a truth that some just do not want to admit and that is the end is coming. Following a beginning is an end. The end is better than the beginning. A time is coming when our walk here will end. We will move on to the next part of God's house. For the faithful, it will only get better. What God has in store for us is amazing. There is nothing like it any where on this planet. Until then, we must keep going. We must keep trying to make a difference. The end is better than the beginning.

I want to thank all of our Jump Start readers for sticking with this little devotional. You have encouraged me more than you will ever realize. Our readership is at an all time high. More and more people are being touched, encouraged and having oxygen put back into their souls because you are sharing these. Thank you. I thank the Lord that we have been able to build relationships with one another through these daily writings. I do hope that you have found something in these writings that convinced you to hang in there and stay on the journey with the Lord.

Finish strong. The end is better than the beginning.

Roger Shouse