



THE EXHORTER

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

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February 15, 2015

Jump Start # 1271

2 Kings 7:3-4 *“Now there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate; and they said to one another, ‘Why do we sit here until we die? If we say, ‘We will enter the city,’ then the famine is in the city and we will die there; and if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us go over to the camp of the Arameans.”*

Our passage today comes from the days of Elisha, the prophet. It was a terrible time for Israel. The nation was facing two incredible enemies, one inside the city and the other outside the city. Inside, there was a famine. So severe was this famine, that simple items were not affordable. Some resorted to cannibalism. The chapter before tells of two women who made a pact to eat each other's child. Outside the city sat the other enemy, the Syrians. They had surrounded the city and just waited. Instead of attacking, they waited. They let the famine do it's work. Death, was certain, either by starvation or the sword.

Outside the city, where our verse takes us, sat four lepers. They could not be in the city because of their illness. Unlike the people within the city, these four men had yet another enemy, a deadly disease. Famine. Syrians. Leprosy. They sat. They ran out of hope. No one was going to bring lepers food, when there was no food for the healthy. Desperation and fear drove out any hope they had for survival.

These lepers came up with a plan. There was nothing in the city. They knew of the famine. They would starve like everyone else. The only place where there was any food was in the Syrian camp. Go to the Syrians. If they were killed, it's not much better than sitting around and awaiting for death to come.

As they approach the camp of the Syrians, they find it empty. In the night, God caused a mighty sound like approaching horses. The Syrian leaders thought the Egyptians had come to save Israel. The Syrians fled, leaving everything. Our four lepers come to find food, clothes and supplies. They rush back to the city to tell the good news.

I love this story. It's awesome. There are two prevailing thoughts that drive our verse today.

First, these four lepers understood the situation that they were in. Things were bad. They were very bad. Death was most certain, either by disease, Syrians or famine. They understood this. Knowing this leads to the next step.

But how many never see things as they really are. They live in a fantasy world. They have allowed pride to color their vision and have accepted denial rather than reality. The marriage is sinking, but they don't see it. The church is falling apart, but they think things couldn't be better. It was the reality of the situation that led the prodigal to his senses and then to take the next steps to coming home. Without seeing things as they are, he would have crawled right in with the pigs and ate next to them.

(OVER)

There is a balance between being optimistic, pessimistic and seeing reality. Some never see anything good. It's always dooms day. It's always black. Others, only see sunshine, even in the midst of a storm. Hope lives in optimism. However, reality is what will lead us to taking the proper steps.

Do we see things as they really are?

The second step that these four lepers took was to plan what to do. They decided to go to the Syrian camp. They did not know that God was working with them and through them. Had they given up, they would have died. Had they gone to the city, they would have died. They became the saviors for the city. Their plan was based upon seeing things as they really are.

For us, a couple may seek marriage counseling because things are not going well. Or, they might seek financial help because they are drowning in debt. Or, they might take a teenager to counseling because of his anger issues or addictions. It's hard to do those things. But not doing them leads to death. The death of a marriage, financial dreams or relationships. A church might have to be honest and have some serious talks among itself. The leadership may have to spend some evenings getting on the same page. They may have to try some innovative ways to pump life back into a dying church.

These four lepers saw things as they really were and then they did something. How sad it is when some never see things as they really are or worse, they see it, but they don't do anything. They give up. They throw in the towel. They wait for death to come. Death of a marriage or death of a church.

I was with a man last week who was at this place. He is preaching for a tiny group. The church is on life support. Another decade and the church probably won't be there. I've made all kinds of pamphlets where we are at. He asked me to design some for this dying church. He was going to have the members pass out 1,000 of these in the neighborhoods. He was trying to take the church to Syrian camp. Instead of just sitting around complaining or thinking about how things used to be, this one person, with the spirit of these four lepers, saw things and came with a plan to do something. I hope it works for him. I hope that he will bring life to that church.

Now, all of this comes to us. What about us? Do we see things as are they really are? Then, are we doing anything about it? Too many in leadership roles are doing anything but leading. There was a king in the city, but he wasn't doing anything. He couldn't even stop the cannibalism. Sometimes the same happens today. Members turn on each other. The gossip, mean spirited comments, mistrust eat at each other. Instead of leading toward life and hope, some leaders, as the king in this story, did nothing. Things declined. Nothing was done.

The hope came from a very unlikely source, four lepers. Four lepers and an abandoned Syrian camp became the hope for Israel. God can use anyone, even lepers. God can use anything, even Syrian camps, to bring life and hope to His people.

So, open your eyes. Look about. See things as they are. Don't give up. Don't give in. God was there for Israel. God is here for you. What are you going to do about the situations in your life?

Roger Shouse