



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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Jump Start # 1291

Revelation 12:11 *“And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.”*

Yesterday I was reading about the twenty one Egyptians who were beheaded by terrorist ISIS group. A link took me to the actual video. I do not recommend you see that. It was very disturbing, gruesome and horrific. These men were captured because of their faith. More and more the world is seeing parallels to the Nazi's in the 1940's. Strong and powerful strikes is what is needed to cripple this hateful and murderous group, who has no regard for the dignity of life.

These things are shocking to this generation, and they ought to be. However, turning the pages of the Bible and we find John the Baptist being beheaded. We find the three Jewish captives being burned alive in Babylon. Daniel being thrown to lions. Stephen was stoned to death. James killed by the sword. Young children were executed by Pharaoh and later Herod. Many of these we read about in the Bible who were killed, were put to death by their own governments. There was no world wide uproar. There was no coming air strikes against the murderous lot. Prayers for safety were not answered in the way they wanted. It seemed that God turned His face and allowed His people to be struck down.

We have not faced this before. We talk about it in Bible classes, but the threat that some could capture us and kill us simply because we believe in Jesus is becoming more and more of a real concern.

Our verse today helps. It shows something that we all need to realize. Those brave Christians who faced the torturous hands of the Romans overcame. They were triumphant. They were the conquerors. Not physically, because many died. They did not break out of prisons, storm the troops, over power them and then led a counter attack against the palace. That stuff belongs in the movies. Instead, they bravely faced their executioners with courage. When told to denounce Christ, they refused. When threatened, they would not buckle under pressure.

Three things are listed in our verse today.

First, they overcame by the blood of the Lamb. They suffered as Christ had suffered. They followed the example of Jesus. That pure blood of Christ cleansed them, and brought them into the family of God. They belonged to God. They were living and dying by faith.

Second, they overcame because of the word of their testimony. Their faith. Their convictions. Their beliefs. It was not the word of the Lord, but the word of their testimony. Hearing fellow believers courageously refusing to deny the Lord that loved them and saved them, gave them the fortitude to face death.

Third, they did not even love their life when faced with death. This is the most telling statement in our passage. This says it all. Those that love their life, will do anything to save it. They will prolong life medically, often because this is all that they have. Others, would lie, steal or cheat, just to stay alive. But then there are those brave Christians who our verse is highlighting. They did not love their lives even when faced with death. Why not? Because of faith. They knew. They believed. Jesus said fear not the one who can kill the body and do no more. Death, they understood, was not the end of the story. The cemetery isn't the last page. Rome could crush the body, but Rome could do nothing to the eternity of these disciples. And where are Caesars today? They are the name of a salad that people eat. No one fears them. They do not exist any longer. And God's kingdom, larger, stronger than it has ever been.

This last statement, not even loving life when faced with death, affects how we see things. It changes things. We walk by faith and not by sight. Our hope is not here, but elsewhere. Today, we do not have the threats that these early Christians faced. However, we can more concerned about our reputation, our image, our friends, than our faith. Compromises illustrate that. Not being serious about our faith demonstrates that. Playing footsie with the devil does that.

Not loving life. Not loving life will always put Christ before self. Not loving life will do the right thing even if it is hard, uncomfortable, and difficult. Forgiving when you would rather bust someone in the chops. Going out of your way when you'd rather just stay home and watch TV. Being honest when it might cost you a sale. Not ashamed to carry your Bible. Not ashamed to bow your head to pray. Not embarrassed to stand with God on His word. No apologizing for what the Bible says. You are not sorry it says what it does. Realizing that some may think you are narrow. Some will think you are ignorant. Your faith rests in what God says, not what scientists teach, or what society calls normal.

Not loving your life even when faced with death. They were willing to be killed because they knew what was on the other side. Death did not scare them. The same thing stands before the believer who faces death with cancer. Yes, it can be scary but on the other side is where God is. On the other side all will be fine. On the other side all the problems, troubles and pains are no more. They loved not their life because they knew what was on the other side. They believed.

There are early reports of persecuted Christians long ago who were singing hymns as they were executed. They died, as they had lived, believing.

Roger Shouse

