



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)

June 14, 2015

Jump Start # 1316

Luke 16:29 *“They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.”*

Our passage today comes from that wonderful account of the rich man and Lazarus. What a fascinating lesson. Two men so different in life and complete opposites in death. The rich man had every thing in life. Poor Lazarus did not have even basic food or medical care. In death, Lazarus is in comfort, resting in Abraham's bosom and the rich man is tormented in fire. There doesn't seem to be anyone for the rich man to talk to where he is at. He speaks across the great chasm or gulf and gets the attention of father Abraham. He begs for water. Not happening. He begs for Lazarus to be sent back to the living to warn the rich man's five brothers. It is interesting that he doesn't ask to go back himself, he asks for Lazarus to be sent. Not happening. No one is crossing over and no one is going back.

This must add to the rich man's frustration and misery. I expect he was pretty used to getting his way and commanding orders for others to obey. Not now. He doesn't get his way. He can't push people around. He carries no position and no prominence where he is at.

He realizes that his brothers are just as indifferent to their souls as he has been. I expect his brothers attended the rich man's funeral. They may have divided up his estate after his death. But his death didn't move the needle spiritually for them. They did not take it to heart. The rich man knows unless something radical is done, his brothers will be with him in torment. It's too late to do something for himself, now he is concerned about them. It's too bad that he never seemed very concerned about Lazarus as he lay dying at his gate. He wants Lazarus to go back and tell his brothers. He believes they would listen if Lazarus talked to them. He's certain that they could be turned if only Lazarus would go. But that too, wasn't going to happen. Our verse is Abraham's response. They have Moses and the Prophets. Moses and the Prophets pretty much sum up the Old Testament. The Law of Moses would have showed them how to treat the poor. It didn't do anything for the rich man. He had the very things that could have kept him from being lost. He ignored it just like his brothers were currently doing.

The plea of the rich man is repeated even today. Folks want something special. They want God to nudge them, whisper to them, lead them, shout to them in a visible, audible way. They are wanting something special and something unique. A sign from Heaven is what the Jews asked Jesus for. He told them that they would get no sign other than the sign of Jonah and the fish.

(OVER)

You and I have the very things that not only can keep us out of agony, but can change our lives and make them meaningful and pleasing to the Lord. What we have is the word of God. The Bible is alive as Hebrews reports it. It transforms us. It builds faith and confidence. It comforts the weary heart. It drives out doubts and fear. It becomes our best friend.

It is not uncommon to have folks ask if you will go talk to a family member or a friend about their spiritual condition. I do that often. Where I always end up is with the word of God. There are no magical words, no warm story that will immediately bring them to change. It must come from God's word. The Bible must be the source and reason for change. No threats, no bribes, no incentives will bring lasting change. Some, for the sake of a marriage, will change a little on the outside, until the marriage is sure, then back to their old ways they go. They never really changed. Some will put on a good face when mom and dad come to town. They'll get down to the church house and act as if they are responsible for holding the walls up. But as soon as the parents leave town, so does the appearance of these faithless children. They are putting on a show. Nothing is there. It's like the hollow Easter bunny. It looks good on the outside, but it's empty on the inside. There is no spiritual interests. There is no Biblical understanding. There is no desire for godliness. However, when there is a death, they'll come running, wanting the preacher to put their loved one into Heaven. How shallow all of this is.

With great reservations, and totally destroying the intent of Jesus' lesson, I now explore what might have happened had the rich man had compassion for poor ole' Lazarus. It might have run something like this:

One day, as the rich man was leaving the gate to enter town, he noticed the sickly Lazarus. He immediately stopped his carriage and ordered his servants to carry the man into his house. There, Lazarus would have been gingerly laid in a soft bed. Water and food would have been offered to him. His wounds would have been cleansed and bandaged. Servants would have been sent to bring the doctors at once. The rich man may have stayed up through the night watching over Lazarus. In time, the poor man started to gain his strength. His wounds started to heal. Bathed and in new clothes, his appetite returned. Soon he would be sitting up and even talking to the rich man. A friendship emerged. The poor man gained full health. It was time for him to move on, but by now the rich man had grown fond of him. He had been taught and reminded the ways of God. The rich man's brothers become friends of Lazarus as well. The rich man gave Lazarus a job and they would travel together to the synagogue to worship. The destiny all these people and their families changed because the rich man opened his heart and his home to Lazarus. God was thanked, honored and praised.

That could have happened. That would have been a wonderful story. Together in life and together in paradise. Side by side in Abraham's bosom after they crossed over the doorway of death.

But that's not the story. That didn't happen. The rich man died, ignoring Lazarus, ignoring the word of God and ignoring the Lord. They were not together, either in life or in death. What could have happened, didn't.

Now, how about your family and your friends? Do you have one in your life that is walking the same direction as the rich man? Does he ignore God's word and the Lord? Will he too be forever in agony? Maybe it's time for you to take a chance and speak to him. Maybe your story can be different. It didn't happen in Luke 16. Could it happen in your world?

Roger Shouse

