



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)

Aug. 16, 2015

Jump Start # 1398

Ecclesiastes 7:1 *“A good name is better than a good ointment, and the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.”*

Our verse today is taken from the contrasting section of Ecclesiastes where Solomon declares one thing to be better than another. There are a series of six contrasts in this context. On the surface, most would initially choose the ones that Solomon does not call better. The end of our verse illustrates this. Given the choice, a birth or a death, most would take the birth. People are excited at births. They are sad at deaths. In an instant someone becomes a grandma and her world is magically changed into buying things for the new little grandchild. I've seen that in my own home.

The front part of our verse is where our attention is focused on today. A good name is better than a good ointment. Solomon is driving at reputation, character and what one has done with their life. Some names sound successful. Some names are catchy. I knew a guy whose last name was Gunn. He had a boy that he named, "Thomas." Everyone knew him as "Tommy Gunn." Cute. This is not what Solomon is meaning by a "good name." A good name comes from a person being good. The choice of a name given by parents does not set the course for one's life. However, certain names remind us of a terrible life or a great life. I've never met a person named Judas or Jezebel. Those two names from the Bible are certainly not "good."

I was reading a section of church history the other night. I came across an Emperor whose name was Michael III. He lived long ago in the mid-800's. He was the last in a line of rulers and the early historians did not view him very favorably. He was known more so as Michael III, the Drunkard. He squandered the empire's wealth, lived a very loose and immoral lifestyle and was pretty rotten. Modern historians seem to view him in a more favorable light and even attributing some outstanding things to his reign. Michael III, the Drunkard. You know his mother would have never named him that. He got that tag from the way he lived. His choices led to him being known by that nickname.

So, Solomon tells us it is better to have a good name. How does one get that good name?

Some begin life on the coat tails of their parents good name. Solid citizens, decent people, good folks, "church going" people, as some used to say, are the environment that some of us come into this world. There have been doors opened to us because of the good name of our parents. But in time, we must make our own mark. Some have taken that good name and run it into the mud. Some have resented that good name. Some have gone the other direction on purpose, because of that name.

Others, have just the opposite start in life. Maybe your parents weren't good citizens. Maybe their reputation was dishonesty, cheating and even connected to serving time in jail. "You are one of them," was not a good thing to hear growing up. Maybe doors were shut before you were even given a chance, because of your family name. But again, in time, we must make our own mark.

So we may start off ahead or behind because of our family name. Some get it easier and others must work harder because of that family name. But that's just the starting point. It's like watching the horses start at the Derby. The gates open and off they go. Some take a fast lead, others are slow getting out of the gate. But it's a long race, and the start doesn't tell the whole story.

How you treat others, how ethical you are, how consistent you are, builds that name. Playing favorites, ignoring the rules for your own sake, being lazy, lying, cutting corners, blaming others, living on excuses-it doesn't take much of that until your name becomes sour. Word gets out and gets around about bad names. Folks say, "You can't trust him," and they don't. People steer clear of one with a bad name.

The opposite is just as true. As one sets about life, they are honest, generous, kind, helpful, hard working and making right the mistakes that they've made, it will be noticed. Word gets around. In the work setting, promotions come. In the family setting, there is that one that everyone can go to for advice.

A good name. We still stick to that principle. When someone new moves into the area and they want to find a new doctor, dentist, mechanic, car dealer, baby sitter-they start asking around. They ask people at work. They ask neighbors. What they hear is a good name or don't go to this one, a bad name.

Don't you think the same could be said of a congregation? Some congregations may have a good name and others a bad name? We remember from Revelation that one congregation had a name that they were alive, but the Lord declared them to be dead. What others thought about them, wasn't how the Lord saw them. That is a concern. First, and foremost, we must please the Lord and walk with Him in the direction that He is going. It really doesn't matter how great folks love you, if you are doing wrong, it's wrong.

Having understood that, congregations can have a good name or a bad name. They can be known to be unloving, unforgiving and a closed club that no one on the outside can break through. That reputation will affect the church's growth. If they are known to be mean, then folks will stay away. If they are known to be fighting, then few will darken the doors. Word gets out. People know.

But a congregation that is known to be loving, helpful, kind, and there for people who are working through problems will get a great name. When it is known that the church isn't perfect but the Lord is, that spirit becomes encouraging. People will know it to be a serving church. It will be known as a loving church. The community sees it by the large numbers that turn out at a funeral home or the large quantity of food that is made for a grieving family. It is known because the people seem to care about the place. It is known because people want to be there.

The other Sunday night, I was coming to our church building. The traffic was bad. It's usually not that way on a Sunday evening. Bumper to bumper and stopping a lot. Then I noticed a long line waiting to turn into our parking lot. The cars couldn't turn because there were so many coming from the other direction that we also turning in. It seemed like everyone was coming to our place. That's a great sign. That's a great feeling. Something good is happening. People want to be there.

A good name-it takes time. It takes being good. It takes doing good. It takes consistency. Whether we talk about an individual, a family, or a congregation, there is something about that good name.

What you do today helps build that name. Look around. There are those that you can help. There are those that you can encourage. There are those that need to see Jesus. There are those that you can make a difference. This is how a good name is made. When one has messed up their name, it can be turned around, it will just take time, often a long time.

Good name...how people know you. How the Lord knows you.

Roger Shouse

