



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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Jump Start # 1453

Joshua 1:1-2 "Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying, 'Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to the, to the sons of Israel.'"

Change and transitions are often uncomfortable and difficult in life. We are a people that gets accustomed to things. New traffic patterns, new looks on our computer screens, new faces in the neighborhood, a new boss, a new school—all of these bring a certain amount of uncertainty and uneasiness to us. Sometimes we simply do not like the change and would rather go back to the old ways, but in some situations, there is no going back.

Israel experienced that in our passage today. Moses was dead. What a shocking revelation that was. His death was very unusual. He died upon the mountain in the presence of the Lord. The Lord took his life. There doesn't seem to have been anyone else around. After his death, the book of Jude tells us that there was a dispute about his body between Satan and Michael, the angel. In probably the shortest funeral address ever given, the Lord declared, "Moses, My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan." Moses is dead, get on with what you are supposed to do. It wasn't Moses who their faith was in. It wasn't Moses who fought the battles for them. The Lord was the one. The Lord was still with Israel.

One wonders what Joshua felt that day he learned of Moses' death. He was being groomed to replace Moses, but it seems now he is thrust to the front and must take charge. For forty years, Israel woke up every morning knowing that Moses was the leader. He stood before Pharaoh. He parted the Red Sea. He climbed the mountain to talk to God. He brought back the commandments. He led them through the wilderness. He was always at the helm. For forty years it was Moses. Now, Moses was dead. Would Joshua be like Moses? Would Joshua know what to do? Would Joshua be as brave as Moses? Would folks make comparisons? Would they say, "Moses always did this"? Would the people wish that Moses was still around? Joshua was his own man. He wasn't Moses II, he was Joshua.

(OVER)

This lesson reminds us that life is full of changes and transitions. Our favorite teacher retires. The great boss that everyone loves turns the keys over to his son, who is young and nothing like his dad. Star athletes hang it up. Preachers move. Our pets die. The kids grow up and move out. The neighborhood changes. Stores stop carrying our favorite item. The Moses in our life dies. We are just around the corner from some holidays. I know several families this year that will have to deal with an empty chair for the first time. A loved one has passed away. They are still grieving and the holidays are painful reminders that things will never be the same again.

First, as much as we want to fight the changes in life, they happen. Some of them give us new opportunities that we would not know about. Eighteen years ago our family moved from Indiana to Kansas City. Our entire family was in Indiana. We knew no one in Kansas City. We spent a decade there. The move was good for us spiritually and it opened new doors for the kids that probably would have never happened had we stayed where we were. That first Christmas in Kansas City was tough. All four kids wanted the same thing for Christmas, move back to Indiana. Some changes are good. Some are not. The new school, the new boss, the new neighbor, the new preacher, may not be as good as the last one. A mistake we make is comparing the new with the old. Each is different. Comparing Joshua with Moses would not be helpful nor beneficial to Israel. Moses was gone. He was not coming back. Joshua was their leader. He was the one that God wanted.

Second, God wants us to continue on with Him. That's the thrust of Joshua 1. Obey Joshua as you did Moses. Keep the commands of the Lord. When we do not like the change, we often feel like quitting. The empty house seems so large and quiet when the kids have moved away or a mate has passed on. Loneliness is hard to deal with. It's like a cancer that simply will not go away. What helps is surrounding yourself with people, even when you do not feel like it. What helps is to continue on with the Lord, even when you do not feel like it. Quitting is never a good option. Get back up on your feet and move forward with the Lord. That's the call for Israel. God had a land for them to take possession of. They needed to be busy. That same thought helps us when we deal with transitions and changes.

Third, with Moses gone, Joshua really shines. He leads the nation around Jericho. He gives us the famous, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" statement. Out of the shadows, Joshua showed his own leadership skills. Changes do that. It gives others the opportunity to shine. Talent can lay buried and unused as long as there was a Moses around. But now, Joshua was his own man. Often in changes and transitions, new ideas, new methods, new ways of doing things are explored. In the end, things can be better. Give them a chance.

God didn't give Israel much time to be in the dumps about Moses' death. It was time to gather up things, put on the marching boots and cross that Jordan to a new land. That helped them deal with Moses' loss. They didn't just sit around looking at pictures of Moses all day long. They got busy. That thought helps us when we deal with changes in our lives. A new family shows up in the neighborhood. That's a great opportunity to make some cookies and go meet them. Welcome them. Get to know them. A new boss shows up at work. He's nervous. Extend some kindness to him. I have been that new preacher in a congregation. Boy, that's scary. For a month all you hear about is the last preacher. Some wanted the last preacher to still be there. That's awkward. But then there is that wonderful family that takes you in and makes you feel loved, welcomed and wanted. In time, things get much better.

Change is hard. We all go through it all the time. Few things stay the same. How we handle change and what it does for us really shows our character and what we are made of.

I hope these thoughts help you who are experiencing some real changes in your life. Remember, to be patient and be helpful to others who are going through some changes for the first time. Your experience can make all the difference to them.