



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)

May 1, 2016

Jump Start # 1557

Mark 9:48 "where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."

I've been on the road a lot lately preaching in other places. When I'm gone, we have a huge talent pool at home that fills in for me. I've been listening to some of those lessons, trying to catch up on things I have missed. My friend, Bob, preached an amazing lesson on the subject of being lost. He referred to our verse today. I've been thinking about that verse.

In Mark nine, Jesus repeats this statement three times. It always follows a brutal statement.

- If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. Better to be crippled than go "where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."
- If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. Better to be lame than go "where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."
- If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out. Better to be blind than to go "where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."

What horrific words. What a scary thought. You won't find our verse cross stitched on some grandma's sofa pillow. You won't find it on a plague hanging on someone's kitchen wall. You won't find this verse in the list of favorite verses. Try teaching this verse in a kid's Bible class. You'll have the class running in fear and parents ready to toss you out the window. This verse doesn't fit in the theology of the modern church. They have a high-fiving, good times Jesus who tells stories, winks at wrongs and pats kids on the head. Modern theology has out grown the subject of Hell. Few talk about it. Some don't even talk about sin any more. If there is no sin, there won't be any Hell. Everyone goes to Heaven. What a happy, happy neighborhood we have built by hand picking what verses we will use.

Jesus didn't paint a false picture. The merciful God is also a just God. He wants us to be righteous and holy. He wants us to walk with Him. There is no side stepping that principle. To reject God is to reject any hope of salvation.

Two thoughts from our verse today:

Jesus is not talking about actually harming the body. He does not want you to cut off your hands and feet. Those are not the cause of our problems. A few pages earlier in Mark, Jesus said the source of our sins was from within. It is out of the heart that comes evil thoughts, fornications and such

things. Cutting off the hands, feet and plucking out the eye will not stop immoral and wicked thoughts. Jesus is stressing the extreme sacrifice of putting Heaven first. Nothing should stand in the way of Heaven. Without a hand, foot or eye, one is considered handicapped. He is limited in what he can do. It is better to do without and not miss Heaven.

How important is Heaven to you? That's what Jesus is driving at. What would you give up for Heaven? Would you walk away from friends that are taking you down the wrong path? Would you change a college major because your mind is getting polluted with false doctrine? Would you quit your job because it's destroying your soul? Would you move to a different city if it saved your soul? Would you stop going to concerts, if that is what it took for you to be righteous and holy? Would you find a different congregation if that is what it took to help you be spiritual? Would you drive 50 miles one way to worship and be part of a growing church? Would you stop going to family reunions because they destroyed you with guilt and shame? Just how far would you go for the Lord? Cut off your hand? That is so drastic. There is no growing your hand back. There is not changing your mind once it's done. The literal amputation of the hand would be painful, and it would limit what you could do for the rest of your life. Some of the choices you make in life may be painful and they may limit you if that is what it takes to get to Heaven. Jesus is showing the seriousness of this. Many don't see this. Some admit, "Sure, I do a few things here and there that I probably shouldn't, but I still go to church on Sunday." That guy isn't serious about Heaven. "A little flirting at work is just innocent fun." Really? You're not serious about Heaven. "I don't want to be a fanatic." You're not serious about Heaven. So, your family thinks you are taking things to the extreme. Jesus did. He had the cross. So, others say, "You don't have to do that." You know better. You do. You want to go to Heaven. Painful, limiting sacrifice. That's what is found here. It is better to have sacrificed and survived than to be whole and lost.

Jesus also graphically tells of the punishment of Hell. The picture, just as graphic as amputation, shows fires that never go out and worms that never die. I've been doing some gardening this week. I've run into a few worms. You don't find them on the side walk sunning. Those worms are dead. Worms are found in the mud, muck and mire. The environment that keeps worms alive sickens many of us. That's where worms are. That's the image of punishment. It's not pleasant. It's not nice. It's not corrective. It's awful. It's made for Satan and his kind.

The theological question often asked, "Does the punishment fit the crime?" Who says it has to? Get the American legal system out of your head. This isn't "Law and Order." This is God. A person who lives a life without God, gets to spend an eternity without God. That means fire and worms. That's life without God. Too busy. Too bored. Too smart. No need. Church too traditional. Don't like preaching. Don't like the music. Too many rules. Too many hypocrites. Come up with whatever reason you may for not following God and that path takes you to worms and fire. You can't have it your way and still have Heaven. You don't deserve Heaven. God doesn't owe you Heaven. You may think your life here is "Hell," it's not. Here you have options and choices. There are no worms and fire here. The worst day you have here will still be far better than any day in Hell.

God doesn't send someone to Hell for shoplifting or saying a word that they shouldn't say. God allows a person to choose Hell because they don't want Him. We are not sent to Hell. We've chosen Hell. God is only granting what we want. So continue to drink the poison of false religion, fall into the trap of entertainment worship, ignore God, close your eyes to the Bible, do as you please and you have chosen for yourself, an eternity without God.

Those are harsh words. Those aren't nice. You won't fill a church house with that kind of thinking. Well, what's the alternative? Ignore the worm and fire verses? Preach a happy Jesus. Allow folks to do what they want. Fall in line with men claiming to be women. Marry who ever and what ever you feel like. Let society determine doctrine. Be more concerned about global warming than eternal fire. Save the whales but abort the human babies. Get, grab and go as much as you can. God made us. God put us here. God wants us to live with Him, through Him and by Him. We ought to be thankful