



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 # 1670

Ecclesiastes 2:16 *“For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten.”*

Ecclesiastes has a way of taking the breath out of us. We tend to think that we are superstars and are doing such great things. Then we read the pages of Ecclesiastes and it reminds us that there is one fate that faces all of us, death and soon after that we will be forgotten.

Recently, I experienced the truthfulness of what Solomon was saying. A friend and I, about once a month, travel the back roads of Indiana and Kentucky tracing down old church buildings and the graves of some of this regions first preachers. Restoration history is the official name of this form of study. I've got stacks of books and articles in this area, but nothing beats seeing things with our own eyes. On one trip, I got to hold some very rare first addition books that we part of a long ago preacher's library.

The other day, my friend and I were off on another journey. We were on the back roads outside of a small Indiana town. I don't think I could have found this place on my own. Along side some small road sat a small cemetery. There were only about ten graves in this cemetery. We were only interested in one and there we found it. His name was David. He was an early circuit rider preacher among the Baptists in the early 1800's. He spent most of his time in Kentucky but died and was buried in this small place in Indiana. For all of his sermons and for all of his travels, he is remembered for one memorial service that he preached. Three years after Indiana became a state, according to most historians, David, traveling the hills of Kentucky preaching, received a letter from a nine year-old boy. His mother had died and was buried without any formal service. The simple letter asked if he would come and preach a memorial service. No dates or time was set. There was a huge uncertainty whether the letter would even reach the preacher. No post offices, no stamps, no "mailmen" existed back then. The letter was passed from friend to friend to try to find preacher David in Kentucky, somewhere. Folks didn't even know where he was in Kentucky. It finally reached him and in March of 1819, preacher David traveled on horseback over 100 miles to a small village in Indiana to preach a memorial service for a woman named Nancy. And for all the sermons, and all the travels and all the funerals and all the weddings that preacher David conducted in his life, he is remembered for this one thing. The little nine year-old boy that wrote the letter was Abraham Lincoln. His mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln had died that precious December. David Elkins, the preacher, buried in a nearly forgotten cemetery, in the back roads of Indiana, is known for this one event. He was the man who preached the funeral for Abraham Lincoln's mother. Had Lincoln not become the famous president, David Elkins, as Solomon tells us in our verse, would have been completely forgotten by this generation.

(OVER)

As I stood and looked at this grave, I had to reflect upon my own life. I have a room at our church building that is packed with three and a half decades of my work. I have notebooks full of bulletins that I have written. A bulletin every week, for thirty-six years. Everyone of them saved. There are file cabinets, several, stuffed with sermons. There are dozens and dozens of notebooks of classes that I have taught. A lifetime of work is housed in this one room. This room represents hours and hours and hours of work, thinking, writing, teaching and preaching. And to think, as in the case of David Elkins, all of it comes down to being remembered for one funeral. Nearly everything taught and written will be forgotten. Nearly everything, if not everything, saved, will one day be pitched. This has a way of humbling a person. It makes one realize that he is not so great that monuments will be built in his honor. It makes one realize that Solomon is right, in coming days all will be forgotten.

If one is not careful, these thoughts will lead a person to conclude, "who cares." It may lead a person to wonder, why do I work so hard? Why do I put so much into it? Why not just enjoy life? Why not take the day off and go golfing? Why?

Here's why:

1. Indeed, future generations may not remember or even know of your time here. Ours is for the present. King David served the purpose of God in his own generation, is what Acts 13 tells us. That's what we must do. We are shaping and changing and helping lives all around us. The hours we preachers pour into sermons, most of which will never be preached again, is not wasted. There are those in the audience that are helped that moment. Like the falling rain, it helps the growing crops at the present. It is so needed for the present. The rain that falls today won't do much if anything for next year's crops, but for this season, it makes a difference.

2. Heaven remembers the good that we have done. Jesus reminds us that a cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple will not be forgotten. **(Matt. 10:42)** If Heaven sees and remembers one cup of cold water, what about the hour spent with a lonely soul? What about the few dollars given to a struggling family? What about the book given to a young preacher? What about the funeral service for a nine year-old's mother? God recognizes the good that is done.

3. Eternity can be changed because of the good we do today. One sermon, one article, one class, one discussion, can be all it takes to change a heart and lead one to Christ. The jailer in Philippi. **(Acts 16)** The eunuch on a deserted road. **(Acts 8)** A seller of purple down by a river bank. **(Acts 16)** Your story. My story. Lives are changed because of the goodness that is done. A couple is taught the gospel. They raise their children in God's way and they grow up and become Christians. The spiritual legacy continues on because of one simple family. Most of us can trace such a story in our own families. It was grandpa, or it was great-grandma, who first became a Christian, a long time ago. Now, here we are, journeying down that same path. Forgotten names, a long time ago changed the eternity that has now affected us. What was the sermon or who was the preacher that made grandpa become a Christian? Forgotten. What is remembered is the godly life and the great example he lived. Now that has become our story as we live and love the Lord.

Why do we put so much effort into what we are doing? Why do we try so hard? Why do we want things to be right? Who will care? Who will remember? God does!

David Elkins died before Abraham Lincoln ever became famous. He went to preach the funeral for that poor family simply because he was asked and he wanted to do what he could. He never thought that cool March day in the backwoods of Indiana that the young teary-eyed boy who sent for him would one day be the President of the United States. He went to offer comfort to a grieving family. He did what he could do.

An amazing lesson for all of us.

Roger Shouse