



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 # 1668

1 Corinthians 15:57 *"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

This week we have been looking at a series of things in which Christians are victorious over. We are not a defeated, pitiful bunch. Our spiritual trophy cases are stuffed with victories. We have victory over temptation. We have victory over fear. And, in this final piece, we have the ultimate victory over death.

Paul's superb chapter on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ends with a reminder that we, too, will be raised. Christ was the "first-fruits." And in a taunting fashion, Paul ridicules the finality of death. He says here, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

Satan's greatest tool and man's most dreaded fear, is death. Everyone dies. Everyone that we know that has died, has remained dead. No one dies over the weekend, and is back to work on Monday. Death ends it all. Death held mankind like a slave. There was no getting around it. Everyone died. Kings died. The famous died. The poor died. The rich died. Solomon declared, "there is one fate," and that was death. There was no place you could flee to that would protect you. People died at home. They died in war. They died at work. They died on vacation. The rich couldn't buy a ticket to avoid death. Doctors couldn't find a way to end all death. Since the day Adam left the garden, death has been a part of this world. "It is appointed unto man to die once..." was a sign that hung around our necks. Our time is coming. Research has ended some serious diseases. Rabies, cholera, yellow fever, small pox, polio, while still problematic in some places, has been controlled and defeated in most Western cultures. But people still died. The march is on to defeat cancer. I hope a cure is found. I've lost too many close friends and my own mother to dreaded cancer. Yet, if cancer is crossed off, we will still die. Since Adam, the world is broken and cursed. Death will always be a part of life. In that way, it seems that death wins. It seems that Satan wins. That is, until Christ. He too, died. Yet, He declared ahead of time, that death wouldn't hold Him. "Up from the grave, He arose." Jesus was raised to never die again. Everyone that had been resurrected, eventually died again. That's true of Lazarus. That's true of the twelve year-old synagogue official's daughter. That's true of the young man in the coffin on his way to be buried. They were raised only to die again. Jesus is the first to be raised to never die again.

Death couldn't touch Jesus any more. Death no more had dominion. Death had no victory. O, death, where is your sting? Paul's words remind us that the righteous are victorious over their greatest fear and their greatest enemy, death. Death isn't the end. Death doesn't end all things. Death changes. It becomes only a doorway to the next room in God's house. It allows us to enter a room where death is not welcomed. It allows us to enter a room where there are no more tears, sorrow or mourning.

(OVER)

It allows us to enter a room to be with God. Death is welcome for the Christian. Paul told the Philippians, "to die is gain." Our outlook and our perspective changes because of Jesus. Instead of hating death, it becomes something to look forward to. Instead of seeing it as something bad, it is great for the one who is with Christ. They made it. They made it safely. They get to be where they want to be.

That having been said, the outlook for the Christian at the end of his life is upbeat and cheerful. Nonbelieving doctors will do all that they can to keep a person alive, including surgeries at advanced age, which is really risky, because they do not see anything beyond death. For the Christian, he may skip all those procedures and put his hope in the Lord. There is nothing to lose, literally. Death isn't the end. Death is a defeated enemy.

Oh, I wish I could get brethren to see these things. I wish we could not fear death. I wish we could have the outlook like Paul did. There is a victory to be gained! We win! Just be faithful. Believe. The tears at the funeral of a Christian are so different. There is a hope, as Paul told the Thessalonians. Sure the person will be missed. Certainly, there is a pain. But it's not final. We rejoice because of where they are. In the hands of God, is the best place to be. No more troubles. No more temptations. No more fears. No more Satan. No more bad news. They made it safely. I have witnessed the last breath of several Christians. That last moment is not like the movies. There is no music playing. There is no dramatic, "this is it." Very peaceful. Very quiet. They simply stop. It's at that moment that the angels carry the soul to Paradise. It's at that moment, that I wish I could hold their hand and go with them. What they now see. What they now feel. They wouldn't come back if they could.

We sing about Heaven. Our favorite sermons are about Heaven. We talk about Heaven. But, when one of us actually goes, we act as if it is crippling tragedy that we will never get over. Death for the righteous means being with the Lord.

Victory...celebrate. It's going to be ok. It's going to be amazing. It's going to be incredible. So, don't get fixated upon death. It's just a door, and I might add, an ugly door at that. Satan can't do anything right. Don't fear the door. Look beyond it, to who is waiting for you.

When Jesus raised the little twelve year old from death, the Bible says that the Lord took her hand and spoke to her. I wonder, just wonder, when she opened her eyes, that the first person she saw was Jesus. I rather hope it's that way when the righteous dies. They open their eyes on the other side, and the first one that they see is Jesus. Hope so!

Christ has taken the chill off of death. He has removed the fear of death. Do not fear the one who can take your life and do no more. That is understandable now. So you die. Look where you are going. Do you want to stay around here?

The victory belongs to the Lord! Satan crushed. Fear gone. We busy ourselves in the work of the kingdom, knowing someday we will be on the other side. The sooner we get there the better!

"Won't it be wonderful there..."

Roger Shouse

