



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

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Jump Start # 1766

John 4:35 "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest."

I have recently realized that observation is a gift. Some have it in abundance and some don't. For the longest time I could not understand why some couldn't see what seemed so obvious. I guess they didn't have the eyes of observation.

Our passage is based upon observation. By the calendar, there was still a quarter of the year left before harvest. Four months is a long while for a person who is waiting. Take a vacation. Read a book. Catch up on some odds and ends. When harvest time comes, it will be a busy time. Bringing in the sheaves, as the old hymn reminds us. No time for vacation during the harvest. Yet, Jesus tells these disciples to "lift up your eyes," one of the great lines of the New Testament. Observe. Look. Look on the fields, the Lord says. I know the calendar says we have four months to go, but observation tells us that now is the harvest time. Now is the time to get busy.

Observation-Jesus used this to derail our common problem of worry. In Matthew 6, Jesus says, "Look at the birds of the air" (v. 26). Later in this section He says, "Observe how the lilies of the field grow" (v. 28). Look. Observe. Open your eyes. Lift up your eyes. See. If God takes care of these small things in creation, which are not made in His image and which do not live on in eternity, will He not take care of you?

Throughout the book of Revelation, this thought of seeing things is found. Revelation four begins with, "I looked and behold, a door standing open in Heaven." The next chapter begins, "I saw in the right hand..." Chapter six begins, "Then I saw..." Chapter seven begins, "After this I saw...". The expression, "I saw" is repeated over 40 times in Revelation. The book of Revelation is a picture book. Look. See. Observe.

So, some have the gift to see things and others do not. Those that see things need to share what they see with those who do not see things. This is how we work together as a team. Mom comes home and all the kids are on the couch watching TV, and clean dishes are stacked up in the sink, the trash cans are full and overflowing, there is clean laundry in the dryer and no one is moving on these things. Mom sighs. Mom gets upset and discouraged. She sees these things. The kids never do. Why can't they? Maybe they don't want to. Maybe TV is more important. Maybe they just haven't learned how to lift up their eyes.

(OVER)

The same happens spiritually. A new family comes in and starts worshipping with the church. They don't know many people. Immediately, those with open eyes and observation, see the need to help them connect. They see how wonderful it would be for them to be homes and to get to know others. There are others who would never see this. Once it is mentioned, they'd agree that this is a great idea and some would even offer to have them in their home. But on their own, they would never see this.

It happens with Bible studies. A young couple is struggling. They are hit and miss with their attendance and lately it's been more miss than hit. Those with open eyes and observation, see what is about to happen. Here is another couple that are on the brink of going over the waterfall. They will soon drop out all together. If nothing is done, they will be gone. They need some attention. They need some encouraging. They need some TLC. Observers see this. There are others who would hate to see them go, but they would never see how serious the situation is. They would not know where to begin or what to do. They would never see it until it was too late.

It's becoming more and more apparent to me that the leaders of God's people, the shepherds, need to be those who are observers. The expression, "Overseers" implies that very thought. To oversee means much more than standing in the back of the auditorium and see who is not there. It is to observe. It is to lift up your eyes. They need to see where the sheep need to be and what it will take to get them there. They need to be able to recognize the early stages of spiritual disease. To see what is working and what is not working. To see what is most important. To see what is the biggest threat and concern. How sad it is for a congregation to be led by men with good hearts but who do not see things. In such places, the leaders usually go from one mess to the next, trying to clean things up. They are not preventive because they do not have their eyes lifted up to see what is ahead. They are always looking to what has happened. Instead of planning, they are reactionary. They wait until something happens then they try to clean up what has happened. The Psalmist said, "He leads me to green pastures." The implication is that the green pastures wasn't immediately under his feet. If so, there is no leading that needs to be done. The words would be, "eat." But what we have, is a pasture that has been well eaten. Now it's time to find greener fields. Where to go. When to go. The shepherd knows. He leads. His eyes are open. He is looking ahead. Too many congregations are not looking beyond this current year. Where will they be in ten years? Who will still be among them in ten years? Lifting up eyes. Looking forward. Making plans.

Jesus' words in our verse today tells us that we must not go by conventional wisdom. Forget the calendar. Don't tell me the harvest is still months away. Look. It's ready right now. Some live by the thought that things will just get better. They don't want to get involved, get messy or have to do anything. Slow is the pace and with little being done, they feel that things will just work itself out. Have you noticed that never works in life. With a drip in your bedroom ceiling, right above your bed, do you say, "It'll just work itself out. Give it some time." That thinking is disastrous in parenting, leading God's people or in leaking bedroom ceiling. See what is going on and do something. Lift up your eyes.

We need folks with keen observation. They help those who do not have it. Because of them, they help us to do our duty and keep things going. Those with the gift of observation can't get discouraged because others don't see things. Just share what you see. Share ideas. Share concerns. Do what you can.

Lift up your eyes and see...

Roger Shouse