



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 # 1790

Hebrews 6:19 "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil,"

Hope-what a simple word, yet what a powerful force it is. Hope is what keeps the wind in our sails. Hope is what drives us to seek another day. Hope is what lifts the downtrodden and gives everyman a chance. Hope is one of the grand characteristics of our faith. Hope is fueled by our faith. Hope is sustained by our faith. When all looks dark and dreadful, it is hope that shines a single light pointing the way that we should go.

It is amazing to see all the hopeless people that Jesus encountered. The pitiful widow who was on the way to the cemetery to bury her only son. Her future now dark and uncertain. Who would care for her in coming days? The joys of parenthood all crushed by the hand of death. Yet, when our Lord passed this solemn crowd, heading to the cemetery, it was Jesus who stopped them. Touching the coffin, Jesus spoke to the dead man and told him to arise. Hope restored. He came to life. A funeral cancelled.

There was the Canaanite woman whose daughter was cruelly demon possessed. She sought the Lord for help. The disciples pleaded with Jesus to send her away. Jesus told her that He was sent to the house of Israel, of which she did not belong. Hope and help seem to vanish. If the Lord won't help, who will? Who can? She begged. She cried, "Lord, help me." The cries touched the heart of the Savior. The girl was cured. Jesus never saw the girl, but that didn't matter. Hope restored.

There was the woman with the issue of blood. She had gone from doctor to doctor. Not only could they not help her, she was not only broke from all their costs, she had gotten worse. Hope seems to have vanished for this woman. Sick. Broke. Unclean. Without hope. In a massive crowd, she somehow makes her way up to Jesus. She reaches from behind and touches his garment. Immediately. Immediately she is healed and immediately Jesus knew what happened. He turned. She fell at His feet. Instead of brow beating her, He offered her even more hope.

There was the woman who was caught in the act of adultery. The text says "in the very act." Kindly put, they were doing it, when men broke in, grabbed her and pulled her through the streets. I rather doubt that they waited for her to get dressed, put on her make up and do her hair. No, most likely, she had a sheet wrapped around her and that was about it. We wouldn't go to the mailbox dressed like that. She was pulled through the streets where all could see her. Then into the Temple, unclean and sinful as she was, and thrust before the Lord. The discussion was hostile. Anger filled the air. The Law, they demanded, says she ought to be stoned.

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No one seemed to be on her side. She was being used as a pawn to trip Jesus. No one seemed to care what happened to her. Jesus wrote in the dirt. The universe has long tried to guess what He wrote. No one knows. Jesus told the accusers to stone her, if they were without sin. Not any sin, but sin in what had just happened. Why did they bring a sinful person into the temple? Why did they not also bring the man? Why did they know what was going on? These accusers were just as dirty as she was. The passion of lust quickly turned to the horror of hopelessness. She may very well die right then. She was guilty. Embarrassed. Ashamed. And without a defense on her side to justify the wrongs that she did, she lay there hopeless. The crowd left. Jesus stayed. He told her that He didn't condemn her, but also that she should sin no more. Hope restored. A second chance.

Biblical hope is so different than wishing. We often confuse the two. When people in the house have the flu, we say, "I hope I don't get the flu." We really mean, I wish I don't get it. I hope my Purdue wins the Big Ten. What I really mean is that I wish Purdue wins the Big Ten. Wish, hope. What's the difference? Wishing is wanting and it's often not based upon anything. It's just a guess. There are no absolutes. Biblical hope is based upon God's promises and they are sure and true as our verse tells us. Hope will be, it's just a matter of time. God said it, and that's it. You can take that to the bank. It will happen. How do you know? God said so.

This is why hope is an anchor. It holds us in the storms of life. It keeps us from moving off center. Without hope, people give up. My friend Harmon, took me to the site of a mine cave-in in Ohio. Rescuers worked hard to reach the trapped miners. They couldn't do it. To this day, eighty of them are buried in the rubble. Hope was lost. When there no longer remains hope to turn a sour marriage, a person gives up. Lawyers are called. Divorce papers are drawn up. All hope was lost. Hope is so important medically. It can make the difference in recovery. Those with faith and those with hope, do better. Doctors notice that.

We don't put stock in lucky numbers, four leaf clovers, shooting stars, astrology, fortune cookies or any of those other superstitious tricks. Our hope rests in the resurrected Christ. He is our proof. He is our assurance. He is the exclamation point of the Bible. We shall live on in Christ. We shall be raised one day. We shall see the face of God. How do you know that, some say. How can you be so sure? It's not crossed fingers. It's not wishful thinking. It's not cute positive phrases that we've memorized. It's in Christ. Our hope lies with Jesus. He was the first and we shall follow. He did and so shall we.

That thought, that hope, keeps us going. When we don't feel like it, we get up and keep going. Why? Because of the hope we have in Christ. We others cast doubt and some stand in the way and when it looks easy to stop, we keep going. Why? Because of the hope we have in Christ. We cannot stop living, breathing, preaching, praising and praying for Jesus. It's in us and now nothing will stop us. When arrested and told to stop preaching. Peter said, We can't help but preach about the things we have seen and heard. Ordered not to preach anymore, they continued to preach. There was a hope that was a fire within them.

No school, no government, no peoples can keep us from believing and living for Jesus. It is our hope. It is Christ who lives in us. We shall see the King someday.

You can tell who has hope and who doesn't. Some play at religion and their faith. Others live it. Some are always on the outside looking in. Others are basking in the warmth that hope offers. The hopeful are sure. The hopeful are confident. The hopeful cannot, nor will not be stopped.

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness...

Roger Shouse