



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 # 1909

Hebrews 10:19 "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus"

Our verse today comes from the great connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament that is explained throughout the book of Hebrews. This book, Hebrews, was written to Jewish Christians. Persecution was intense. They were becoming weary. Some were dropping out and quitting. They could go back and be Jews and not suffer. They would still love God. It seemed like a reasonable solution. It was a wrong choice.

In Hebrews, chapter by chapter, the superiority of Christ is illustrated. Better promises are in Christ. Better sacrifice is in Christ. Better law is in Christ. Our verse today is just one of the many layers of establishing that thought. It pulls in three thoughts.

First, the holy place was in the temple. It may be better known as the holy of holies. This is where God's presence was. In the first temple, this is where the ark of the covenant rested. The high priest entered this holy place once a year to sprinkle blood for the sins of the nation. No one else dared to enter. I have seen full size models of this holy place. In some, a manikin is dressed like the high priest. Legend has it that he had a bell around his waist and a rope tied to his ankle. The thought behind this is that priests on the other side of the curtain separating the holy of holies could hear the bell ringing and know the priest is ok. If something happened and the priest needed emergency help, rather than rushing in and facing death for crossing through the curtain, the rope would be pulled and the high priest would be dragged out. I don't know how true all of that is, but I have seen that represented more than once. The point being, no one, under any condition, even emergencies of life or death, dared to pass through the curtain and enter the holy place.

This passage is saying that we can enter into the holy place. Not the actual place in the temple, but the presence of God. We all have access to God. You don't have to be the high priest. You don't have to be of Levi. You don't even have to be of Jewish background. God is calling us to enter. Earlier in Hebrews, the readers were encouraged to come boldly to the throne of grace.

God is calling all of us to come to Him. He wants us to talk to Him in prayer. He wants us to seek Him.

Second, this passage tells us to enter with confidence. We have confidence to enter. What comes to my mind is a "No trespassing" sign. You've seen them. They are nailed on trees and fence posts. They are hung on fences and on abandoned houses and buildings. Keep out, is what they mean. Turn around and get out of there.

(OVER)

Now, if you and I decided to climb a fence and walk through a field that had such a sign, we would be looking over our shoulders to see if anyone was coming. There would be much fear, not confidence. We know that we don't belong there. Our verse is stating the opposite. Don't come to God fearfully and trembling. Don't come thinking that you do not belong. Don't be scared. Come with confidence. Enter as if you belong, because you do.

Third, this permission to enter and the confidence that comes with that is because of the blood of Jesus. His death, opened up the holy place for all of us. Under the Old Testament system, if a person was unclean, they didn't belong in the temple. Not now. We are clean because of the blood of Jesus.

All of this builds upon the powerful concept of prayer. In prayer we reach God. In prayer we talk directly to God. Do you think that you could pick up the phone and call Trump? Do you think you could get through? There are so many layers of people to get through, you would never get through. Even a high school student can't call the principal, not directly. The first to answer the phone would be a secretary. Then, if he was fortunate, the principal would call him later in the day. The same goes for the CEO of your company. It's unlikely that you could just ring him up and have a nice chit-chat with him. Not going to happen. But in prayer, you come into the holy place and speak directly to God. Your prayers are not first received by a divine secretary, an angel or an apostle. God, Himself hears you.

All of us can pray. Not all of us can play an instrument. Not all of us can cook. Not all of us can hit a golf ball straight. Not all of us can get our phones to work. But we all can pray. Little children can pray. Students in high school can pray. Busy house moms can pray. Senior citizens can pray.

All of us can pray anywhere. That's a take off of this passage. Under the Old Testament, there was one holy place. It was in the temple in Jerusalem. If you wanted to access God, you had to get to Jerusalem and find a priest who would talk to the high priest. Even then, the high priest wouldn't dare enter the holy place. But now, you and I can access Heaven anywhere, any time. You can pray while in school. You can pray while driving. You can pray while sitting in a doctor's office. Our prayers are not limited to just the church building and just the time of services. Anywhere and anytime-come. Come with confidence. Come to God.

That thought is amazing! You can always pray. You may not always be able to have a Bible with you, but you can pray. You may not always be with other Christians, but you can pray. Prayer always fits. There is never a place where prayer doesn't belong. When no one understands, God does. Pray. When no one will listen to you, God will. Pray.

Prayer isn't my daily wish list. It's inviting God into my world and my life. It's "Thy will be done, not my will." Prayer works. God listens. This is why we pray. It's not a exercise to relieve stress. God is there. He hears your words. God cares.

Jesus said, "Pray this way. " Peter said, "Cast all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares." Hebrews says, "Come boldly," and "enter the holy place."

There are many things going on in the world today. I read an article about what to do if a nuclear bomb is dropped. I don't know what to do. I've never really ever thought about that before. It's time to pray. That didn't make the list of what to do. It's first on my list. There are many folks who are having difficult times. It's time to pray. There are folks who seem to be confused about what to do. It's time to pray.

Pray often. Pray deep. Keep praying. There is much to be thankful for. God is to be praised.

Enter the holy place with confidence-it's as if God has opened the door of Heaven and is saying, "Come on in." Will you take Him up? Will you come? Will you enter a place that long ago, only a handful were allowed in?

What a blessing we have in Jesus.

Roger Shouse (Used by permission)