



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 # 1948

Job 2:13 "Then they sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights with no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that his pain was very great."

The friends of Job-what a great study found within this powerful book. We remember that Job's story isn't really about suffering but about God. Is God worthy to follow, even when it seems that He has deserted us? Satan believed if all the good things in Job's life were taken away, then Job would curse God. The Lord didn't think so. The Lord knew Job. He was loved not because of the blessings but because of who He was.

All of this certainly makes us look in the mirror as well. Throw in a few hurricanes. Allow a mass shooter to spray bullets of death into a crowd. Turn the world upside down. Remove the blessings. Will we, will you, still believe in God? Can you still believe in God when your loved one lies in the hospital? Can you still believe in God when there are fresh graves in the cemetery?

Satan got a hold of Job's wife. She did what Satan hoped Job would. Throw in the towel on God. Point the finger to Heaven. Curse God. Give up on God. For Job's wife, Satan won. There was no longer any point in following God. If life isn't good, then neither is God. Without blessings and without a good life, why follow God? Job's faith was different. Often that's the case in a marriage. One may be stronger than the other. In this case, it was Job who had a stronger faith. He sat down after the funerals for his children and worshipped God. He didn't understand but he knew God was still God.

Mess with our nice lives and that's all it takes for some to walk away from God. In truth, for some, God buys our commitment to Him. Through blessings we follow Him. Take away the blessings and there goes our loyalty. Is God worthy to be followed even if I get no personal benefit out of it? That's what the book of Job is about. The test of this happens to be suffering and removal of blessings of family, wealth and health.

And then we come to our verse today. Three friends from different places come to comfort Job. They came. That's important. Cards are nice. Text and phone calls helpful. But nothing beats being there. Your presence, whether it's in the surgery waiting room, the funeral home, or just coming by for a visit, shows your love, sacrifice and concern.

For seven days and nights Job's friends sat and nothing was said. They were just there. What do you say, other than I'm sorry. No inquiring questions. No pointing fingers. That would come later. No back seat driver advice. Just silence. Just sitting there.

That's hard for some folks. The way some talk, I expect that they even talk in their sleep. They are always talking. It's like the radio, there's never any silence. Always chatter. Always saying something. Silence. No one saying anything. They just came and sat. A whole week. Can you imagine four people being together and no one speaks. It would kill most of us to last an hour without talking. No emails to check. No texts to look at. Nothing but silence. Not even for a day, but a whole week.

(OVER)

There are some things that Job's friends failed to do. We know as the book unfolds, Job breaks the silence. He begins the third chapter by cursing his birth. That's all it takes. And for 30 plus chapters there are arguments, debating and heated exchanges between these friends and Job. They add to Job's pain. They make matters worse. Job calls them "miserable comforters." They are sandpaper to Job's heart and soul.

Have you ever noticed what the friends failed to do? Simple things. Things that remind us what we ought to do when we go and sit with friends.

First, they never prayed with Job. They talked a lot about God. They seemed to think that they had a corner on why and what God does. Yet in all of this talk about God, then never reached out to the Lord. Even if they believed that Job deserved what he was getting, one could still pray. That's something we can do. We may not understand, but we can pray. We can pray for comfort. We can pray for better days. We can pray for forgiveness. We can pray for help. Talking about God is good. Talking to God is better.

Second, they never brought any food for Job. When people are hurting, either physically or emotionally, they generally do not take care of themselves very well. When Elijah was in the cave hiding from Jezebel, God told the prophet to get out, eat and go appoint someone king. Bring some food. Even if Job didn't want to eat, there was Job's wife. She suffered as well. They didn't seem to do that.

Third, they never seemed to ask Job to go home with them. Get out of that place. Get away for a few days. Come stay with us. Come home and we will take care of you. Job probably wouldn't go. It'd be hard to get him off that trash heap he was sitting on, but they could have at least offered.

Fourth, with Job hurting physically, there doesn't seem to be any offer to get some medicine, a doctor or other help. Maybe that was already done. Maybe more could have been done. Maybe it would have been nice to at least make the effort.

Fifth, the friends do not seem to listen well. When someone cries out in pain, they don't really want a discussion. They need sympathy. They need support. They need love. Job's anguish turned into a bitter argument with his friends. They should have just gone home at that point. They should have recognized that Job wasn't in the place to talk about it. Some will ask, "Why?" They don't really want an answer. They are just calling out in pain. That's the time to hold hands. That's the time let them know that you care. That's the time to offer any services that you can. Cut your yard? Go to the drug store for you? Pick up the mail? Clean your house? Bring you some clean clothes? Get you a bottle of water?

Years later, Solomon would remind us that there is a time to speak and a time to be silent. Some never know when that time is. They talk at inappropriate times and they talk about things that's none of their business or they say things that they don't understand. Useless expressions, such as, "God always turns lemons into lemonade." Really? Is that even Biblical? How is God going to turn the ten graves of Job's children into lemonade? Think that one out before you say it. Or, we love to misquote Romans 8, "All things work together for good." Something good will come out of this. Or, "I just know you'll get better." Really? Got a crystal ball there to see the future? You just know that Job's health problems are not going to take his life? Got a medical degree on the wall? Job's friends opened their mouths and they made things worse. We can do the same. We can pry into places that we do not belong. We can accuse when we don't know the facts. We can play the role of God, when it's not our place. The less said the better.

I tend to think that week of silence with his friends was some of the best comfort Job received. We are in troubled times. Our friends need us. They need us to support them. They need us to be there for them. The day may come when it is our turn to be on the suffering side of things. Open your door to those who want to come and sit with you. This is part of being in a spiritual family. This is what Christians do.

Do it well. Do it right. Help and encourage one another.

Roger Shouse (Used by permission)