



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 # 1949

2 Samuel 24:16 *"When the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord relented from the calamity and said to the angel who destroyed the people, 'It is enough! Now relax your hand!' And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite."*

Our verse today comes from an interesting story in the life of David, the king of Israel. He wanted to know how many people he had in the nation, specifically, soldiers. He sent Joab on a nine month journey through the nation registering the people. The tally revealed more than 800,000 warriors in Israel and 500,000 in Judah. David confessed that he should not have ordered that done. He acknowledged that it was sinful.

God allowed David to pick one of three punishments.

- Famine for seven years
- Flee for three months from your enemy
- Pestilence for three days

What a choice! Seven years...three months...three days. Wars...famine...disease. David couldn't choose. So, God did. Pestilence for three days. It was so severe that 70,000 died. Then comes our verse. God tells the angel to stop. Relax your hand. It is enough.

I like that expression, "Relax your hand!" There are lessons for us.

First, the consequences of our sin often touches other people. It was David who ordered the numbering. Those 70,000 who died were not responsible for David's sin. They were innocent people that were caught up in the punishment. The sins of a parent can impact the children in the home. This rather kills the idea, 'It's my life, I can do what I want.' It's your life, but what you do may impact many others. Just look at the Vegas shooting. One man's sins have turned the lives of 600 people upside down.

Second, God is serious about sin. David wasn't supposed to number the people. It would lead to pride and putting more trust in the size of the troops than in the Lord. He led the Lord's army. It didn't matter how many, the battle belonged to the Lord. You and I might look at this and think, 'well, he probably shouldn't have done it, but it's really no big deal.' It is to God. Seven years...three months...three days-the punishment was serious because the sin was serious. Putting these wrongs on a scale, most would believe that David's adultery was far worse than counting the people. **(2 Sam. 11)** That's how we see things. How we see things is not how God sees them.

(OVER)

Third, there is a limit to punishment. "Relax your hand," meant stop. David would not do this again. This is a hard lesson for parents and for churches. There is a time for correction. The goal is to change hearts that will change behavior. Crossing the line, not relaxing your hand, can destroy the spirit and the hope in a person. Getting even is never the goal in discipline. A person can never get exactly even. It never works out that way. Eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, leaves both parties blind and toothless. There is an expression from Nigeria that says, "When two elephants fight, the grass suffers." Lessons learned, it was time for the angel to relax his hand.

Fourth, over and over in the Bible we see the power of God. Here an angel waving his hand was able to kill 70,000 people. One angel. All the first born in Egypt were killed by the Lord. **(Ex. 12)** In one night, the angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrians. **(Isa. 37:36)** Those numbers are staggering to us. Each person was a soul. Each person had a story. Each person likely had a family and was loved by someone. This is a side of God that our happy society doesn't understand nor believe in. To a world that is drunk on happiness, God is always smiling. Raise a beer to God in tribute, is the thinking of moderns. God doesn't care what we do, as long as we occasionally tip our hat His way, is the way most live. God is on call if you need Him, but He won't interfere with your life, just go and have a good time. The God of the Old Testament, some believe changed. The New Testament God is kinder, nicer and more mellow. How shallow, dumb and wrong this thinking is. God has not changed. He is the same, yesterday, today and forever. He's not looking the other way when we do wrong. He's not patting us on the head and saying, "Aren't they cute." Where does that thinking come from? Certainly, not the Bible. God expects righteousness and holiness. He expects us to obey Him. He wants us to walk with Him, not just when we feel like it, nor when it's easy for us.

Daniel in a foreign land continued to pray to God. Peter, when told not to preach Jesus any more, continued to preach Jesus. Following God isn't always easy nor convenient. Holiness is much more important than our happiness. Much of what folks say makes them happy, is wrong stuff anyway.

Fifth, often what seems good to us is not right with the Lord. Numbering the nation seemed good to David. It took nearly a year to do it. But it was not what the Lord wanted. This is why Isaiah's words ring so true, "My ways are not your ways..." How you and I would do things may not be what the Lord authorizes. This is why we must stay close to the book, know His will and do things as He says.

Relax your hand. I wonder if the Lord would say that to us.

- Relax your heart, and allow Me to take over your burdens
- Relax your fears and enjoy the creation I made for you
- Relax your pushing others and let My word do what it can. It is powerful.
- Relax from beating yourself up with guilt and allow Me to forgive you

Relax your hand! Once again, we see that God is in charge. He always is.

Roger Shouse (Used by permission)

