



# THE EXHORTER

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*“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](http://prchurchofchrist.org))

January 28, 2018

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***Matthew 7:15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves."***

I watched an interesting short nature video on YouTube recently. It's entitled "How wolves change rivers." It ought to be watched by preachers and elders alike. There are many lessons to be gathered from this. Here is a synopsis of the story. The deer population at Yellowstone was destroying the vegetation. The deers had no predators. So, wolves were introduced to the area. In time, the wolves increased and sent the deers out of the valleys to other places. Soon, the vegetation started growing back. Trees grew. Other animals returned, such as rabbits, mice, beaver and otters. Birds, including hawks and eagles returned. But something else happened. Because of the dense vegetation and trees, erosion stopped. Rivers changed their courses and became deep. All of this because of the introduction of wolves.

This has so many lessons for us spiritually.

First, sometimes things are not thought out carefully. Something is introduced or started and the long range impact hasn't been considered. This is why God's kingdom is overseen by experienced and godly men who must think beyond the present and the visible. They must take into consideration how things will impact all segments of the congregation. For instance, some places are replacing the two services on Sunday with one long extended service. No problem with that if that is what is necessary and helpful for the group there. What works in one place may not work in another. Thought must be given to young families and what that does for the children. What works well for empty nesters may not go so well for families with small children. Careful planning, discussion and talking to those in different age brackets is necessary and helpful. I preached a series of lessons once that worked out to being eight sermons in 48 hours. They called it, "8 in 48." Some loved it, I didn't. I thought it was too much at one time.

Second, allowing wolves to run freely can change the landscape of not only Yellowstone, but it can change the landscape of a congregation spiritually. This is why Jesus gave the serious warning, "Beware." Beware of the wolves. They seem innocent. They appear like sheep. They are not sheep. They are wolves. Wolves eat sheep. They are actually false prophets. They have an agenda and it's not following the word of God. They want change. Left alone, wolves can change rivers. Wolves can change a church. It doesn't take long nor does it take very many to do their work. Present some ideas here and there. Float some possibilities. Get some to like what you are saying. Push buttons. Introduce new ideas. Press that envelope and stretch it as far as you can. Left unchecked, wolves can change the landscape of a church. A walk down the halls of church history shows this. A walk down the history of Israel, starting in the book of Joshua shows this. Golden calves.

**(OVER)**

Different cities to worship in. Priests from different tribes. Slowly. Step by step, moving in new directions. Exciting. Innovative. And before long, the church no longer looks like what you read in the Bible. To justify that, new ways of looking at the Bible are introduced. Doctrine becomes something of culture and culture is always changing. New ways. New thinking. New practices. The river changes. The landscape changes. Wolves are not interested in the old paths as Jeremiah spoke about. Wolves are not interested in stakes in the ground. They want to move the boundaries. They want to try things that have always been out of bounds. They are not satisfied with what has been. They want new and they want different. No thought that what God has spoken has worked for centuries. No thought that what God says, goes. Drama rather than doctrine. Playing rather than piety. Having a good time rather than a holy time. It's all about the worshipper and not about the God who is to be worshipped. Wolves can change the landscape of a church.

This is why shepherds must be alert and on the ball. What are the people reading, listening to and being persuaded by? Do you know? Could you recognize a wolf? Jesus' point is that they don't walk into the church building with a sign around their neck, "Hello. My name is Big Bad Wolf." They look like sheep. They may have been one of the sheep in times past. What are they saying when they ask controversial questions? What are they after when they raise objections? What are they filling the ears and hearts of others with? Who is in their network? Who are they influencing?

Often, wolves are allowed to run freely because we've known them for so long. We are friends with them. We grant them a pass, never realizing that they could be up to something that is wrong. Keep your eyes open.

In Titus, the elders were to silence the mouths of those that were upsetting families, teaching things they should not teach. Silence them. They were to be reproved severely. Serious actions for a potential serious problem. Left alone, the wolves will change the landscape of the church. Elders that are too busy, or elders that are asleep at the wheel, or elders who simply do not like to do this kind of work will find a new and different church. It will change right before their eyes. They will either be forced out or forced to go along with things that are not right nor Biblical. Beware! Wolves change the landscape. Who would have thought that a wolf could change a river. Who would have thought that a wolf could change the church.

Third, once rivers have changed, and wolves are running freely, it's nearly impossible to return things to the way they once were. Environmentally, changing rivers and controlling the deer population at Yellowstone is a good thing. However, if it gets to a point that there remains no more deer, how will they control the wolves? In a church, it's hard, once the landscape has changed to return to Biblical patterns that it should have. It can be done, but it's rare and very hard. Most times, it's easier to just live with the wolves. Kevin Costner had a movie called, "Dancing with wolves." I think that sums up our times today. More would rather dance with the wolves than to be on guard against them. Many would naively say, "I don't see anything wrong with what they are doing." Could it be that our eyes are closed or worse, we don't want to see. Once the door of change is opened, it never gets shut again. What one person introduces doesn't seem so bad. Yet with that, the next person takes it a step further. In a generation or two, Israel was bowing down to idols.

Staying the course is hard. We must understand the difference between methods, traditions and doctrines. Those things can get fuzzy and we can confuse the whole group. We must keep up with a fast paced world yet we must remain true to what we believe in and where we stand. God's word never changes. Cultures change. Governments change. Times change. God's word stays the same.

We must wonder if we are creating wolves among us because we are unwilling to budge on traditions and methods. Young people do things differently than senior citizens. Every generation has fought the music of the next generation. Unwilling to listen, unwilling to consider, unwilling to give serious answers to questions may lead some to wolf factory. Discouraged. Defeated. Dying spiritually. Some feel the only hope is to change. What they want to change shouldn't be changed. An atmosphere of "no" may have bred the spirit of a wolf. Younger folks need to know what can and what cannot be changed. They need to appreciate how God's authority is established and works. They need to appreciate the stakes that God has placed in the ground. And, with that, some of us older ones can take a deep breath and see the value of technology, and different forms of teaching.

Wolves changed the rivers. Wolves change the church. Will we ever see this? Will we ever believe this?

Thanks, Jordan, for sharing that powerful video with me.

Roger Shouse (used by permission)