



# 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))

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## Jump Start #2044

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***2 Timothy 4:6 "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come."***

The time is here. Paul was about to exit this world. Locked in a Roman prison, having stood before Caesar once, he knew this time would be it. He would be executed. There was no escaping. There was no getting out of this. His departure time had come. His life was almost over. His work was now finished.

We understand that expression when flying. We look at the monitors at the airport and we make sure we are at the right gate at the right time. The time of departure is important when flying. It's one thing to miss a flight, but there was no missing this coming appointment with death for Paul.

There are two perspectives that we need to look at with this expression, the time of my departure has come.

First, the perspective of the church. Paul had been everywhere. Paul was completely engaged in the work of the kingdom. How would those Christians survive in a world without Paul? He was answering questions from the Corinthians. He'd told two sisters in Philippi to get along. He'd written Philemon and encouraged him to take back the run-away slave. He was building a backbone for Timothy so he would not be so timid. Paul's fingers are on nearly every page of the N.T. and engaged in nearly every church we read about. He is warning. He is encouraging. He is solving problems. He is pleading with others to do better. He is teaching. He is preaching. He seems to be everywhere.

But one day, brethren would wake up and there would be no Paul on earth. He had departed. I expect for a while there was an emptiness felt and a wondering what will we do. Can't write Paul about this, he's not here. Can't seek Paul's advice on this, he's no longer among us. Life without Paul.

Second, from Heaven's perspective, there was no one like Paul. We trace his steps in Acts. We call it, "Paul's missionary journeys." City after city. Church after church. We don't refer to Andrew's missionary journeys. We don't talk about the work of Thomas. Outside of Peter, and a little from John, most of the work of the other apostles is left to speculation, legends and vague historical accounts outside of the Bible. Paul was leaving. Paul was departing. When the apostle James was killed by Herod, there didn't seem to be much of a loss in momentum, growth or spread of the Gospel. Things moved on without him. The kingdom didn't seem to skip a beat. The other apostles died, one by one. We are not told when or how. But with Paul, there are pages and pages about the good he did for the kingdom. Who would take his place? Who would fill his shoes?

Who would care like he cared? Who would sacrifice himself like he did? Life without Paul.

There are some lessons for us in this.

First, there was a transition taking place late in the N.T. that shifted from the voice of the apostles to the written word. It was the inspired word that would fill the place of the apostles. It was that word that disciples would refer to when they had questions. It was that word that would encourage them and warn them. The word would then go farther and farther than the apostles ever did. The word would do more good than the apostles ever did personally. The death of Paul and the other apostles was not crippling to the church. It was part of God's plan. The maturing church would not need physical apostles to survive. The word of God would supply all that they needed.

Second, the church is larger and stronger than any one of us. None of us today are close to what Paul was. We are not inspired. We cannot do miracles. We are not chosen apostles. The church survived without apostles and it can survive without us. The kingdom is bigger than we are. The death or moving away of an elder or a preacher can take the wind out of us, but it doesn't defeat us. Others can rise up and do rise up. Preachers have come and gone and congregations have survived.

This reminds us of our place and role in the kingdom. We are servants and tools of God for the moment. We do all that we can for this generation. We use what is available to us to teach, encourage and build the kingdom. Those before us did the same things in their generation. Preachers rode on trains and outlined lessons on chalk boards. They used mimeographs and carbon paper to make copies of outlines. Before that, preachers rode in buggies and on horse back. They carried lessons in saddlebags and preached in barns, and in homes, and in courthouses. Today, we are using the internet, live streaming across the world and making material in bright colors. The technology and methods have changed, but we are doing the same work. Aside from a few well known names, most today do not know the names of those hard, tireless workers of just a hundred years ago. They did their work and the time of their departure came. The same will be for us. We do all that we can, working as hard as we can, realizing that most in the next generation will not remember us, but it's Heaven that will never forget.

Third, the good that is done is known to eternity. Most of the names that Paul helped, taught and encouraged are not known to us. There are a few names here and there in the N.T., but the majority of those early disciples are not known to us. God knows them. Their faith and love for the Lord is known to Heaven. Those that walked faithfully with the Lord will be numbered among the saved in Heaven. But the same is true of us. Outside of the community and the church where we worship, most even today, do not know the lives that are touched and made better because of the work of the Gospel. God knows. Heaven is being filled with devoted saints that were taught, encouraged and helped by God's tireless workers.

Someday, the time of our departure will come. What good did we do? A person here. A person there. It may look like we didn't do much, but we did. Our names will not be known such as Billy Graham. We will not fill stadiums like he did. We may wonder, what good am I doing. The good you are doing is changing the eternity for someone. You are shining light into a dark world. You are raising a family to know Jesus. You are making a difference. You are passing on the pure word of God.

Life without Paul. Here we are today, and we are doing fine. Someday, it will be life without us. The kingdom will do fine. Others will step up and do what they can. The work will continue until God pulls the plug on this world and Jesus comes. Servant after servant. Soldier after soldier. We are all in this grand work of telling the world about Jesus.

I expect that first Sunday, as news spread of Paul's death, there was some sadness and tears. But sermons were preached. The word was taught. The work carried on. The torch was passed into other hands. And, now that same torch has reached our hands. We carry it with honor. We carry it, knowing who carried it before us. We carry it carefully, understanding that someday we too must hand this same torch over to others.

Life without Paul...an interesting thought.

Roger Shouse

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