



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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1 Corinthians 1:23 "but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness."

I was reading about Jonathan Edwards, the revivalist preacher who is well known for his famous "sinners in the hands of an angry God" sermon. Edwards was well known, the Billy Graham of his day. He died in 1758, before the U.S. officially became an independent country. His estate was valued at 900 English pounds at his death. Among his items were over 1,000 sermons and 30 manuscripts. Those were given the appraised value of a total of six pounds, only pennies for each sermon. It's hard not to read that and wonder what about all my sermons, decades of bulletin articles, and class material? Just what is a sermon worth?

That's an interesting question. According to our verse, the world places little or no value upon those things. The message of the Cross is foolish to a world that is perishing and values happiness more than holiness. Murder mysteries, scandalous novels and stories about aliens have more interests and more value to the world than boxes of sermons. The world considers it foolish to believe that a man died and rose again. The world believes it's foolish to think that God came to earth. Remove God from our thinking and we remove accountability, responsibility and sin. No God, no sin. No God, no fear. So, a box of old sermons would simply not be worth very much on the auction block these days.

But, what is a sermon worth? There are hours of study, writing, and developing a sermon. Every preacher has his own way and his own style. Some memorize their sermon and they have no notes before them. Others, have just a 3x5 card with just a few words on it. Others take full outlines to the pulpit. What's a sermon worth?

Here are some thoughts:

For the person who finds forgiveness in Jesus Christ, there can be no value placed upon that sermon. That sermon served as the avenue in which he came to learn and know the Lord. That sermon changed his life.

(OVER)

For the person who was moved to forgive someone who had hurt him, that sermon served as bridge that restored a relationship and offered peace that is found in Christ. That sermon reminded and showed him how God has forgiven him. That sermon warned him that if we can't forgive others, God won't forgive us.

For the person who realized that his neglect was hurting his marriage and his family, a sermon about the home, can bring lasting changes. A dad becomes more involved with the family. A mom stops nagging. The kids become more respectful and helpful. The home becomes a wonderful oasis and a godly example of what God wants.

Sermons have the potential to change thinking, behavior and even relationships. The power is not in the words of the preacher, but in the Bible. Showing, proving and building truths, a sermon can move us from sleepy laziness to become powerful examples of Christ. Most of us have a favorite preacher and most of us have a favorite sermon. We like a specific sermon because it opened our eyes and through those words we saw the love of God and the wonderful plan He has for us.

I was watching a show about pop singers Don Henley of the Eagles and Billy Joel discussing how they write songs. It's a journey and a process. Getting ideas comes from all kinds of places and people. It's similar to sermons. How do preachers write sermons? How do they do it every week? Where do they get their ideas? From the Bible. From life. From seeing what's going on in the world. From questions people ask. And, week after week, the preacher thinks, studies, writes and tries to find the best way and the best words to impress upon an audience the will of God. He preaches, not to strangers, but to friends and family. He pours his heart out because he wants the best from them. And, as he preaches, he listens to himself. The preacher is a work in progress, like all of us are. He is on a journey, just like the rest of us. He has good days and days that are not so good. He has to be reminded, encouraged and warned, just like the rest of us. Things effect his moods. He gets tired. He gets grumpy. He gets lazy. The preacher is no different than the rest of us and the preacher needs the sermons just the same as the rest of us.

What's a sermon worth? To the world, sermons are worthless. To those who walk with God, sermons are valuable tools that have restored lives, opened eyes, convicted hearts and committed dedication to the true God above. The modern church has replaced doctrine with drama. Comedy, skits, and casualness has replaced reverence, seriousness and a dedication to God's word. Folks today do not know the Bible. Too many preachers today have changed their roles into activists, psychologists and playground supervisors. Back to the Bible we need to be. More Bible, not less. More understanding of what God wants, and less about what we want. More about holy lives and less about happy lives. More about the soul and less about the physical side of life. The modern pulpit has turned God into our servant and has changed Heaven into a fantasy land where every person gets what they've always dreamed about. Sounds exciting, but is it Biblical? Is it true? Modern churches are more concerned about filling the pews than they are filling the heart with God. Popular preachers, just as Joel Osteen, can fill stadiums with his smiles and happy messages, while admitting that he never uses the word "sin." God does.

What's a sermon worth? If it's true to God's word, it's priceless.

Roger Shouse (used by permission)

PS- Many of the sermons that I preach are directed to myself....changes I need to make...things I need to do or start doing.....the fingers I point are directed to myself as well. Joe Stuve