



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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Hebrews 11:4 "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks."

I was thinking about my mom the other day. I'm not sure why, but thoughts of her popped in my mind. Mom has been on the other side, in the other room, for twenty-four years. My kids were little when she passed away. I was still a young preacher. I preached her funeral and I still have a few copies of that filed away. I have moved twice since then. My kids have all grown, married and have their own families. Sometimes you hear people saying about a departed family member, "I think about them every day. Not a day passes that I do not think about them." It's not been that way for me. It was at first, but life and the present fills the mind and the heart. I think about her around her birthday and the anniversary of her death, but most times I don't think about her throughout the day.

But when I thought about her the other day, I also thought about this verse. Abel was dead. He was murdered. The first crime in the Bible. The first human to die in the Bible. The good one died and the one with hatred, jealousy and issues remained. All these years later, the Holy Spirit begins the list of God's faithful with Abel. All we know about Abel's faithfulness is that he pleased the Lord with the sacrifice that he offered. It was in accordance with what God wanted. And, though he is dead, Abel still speaks. There isn't a voice that people hear. It is the voice of influence, example, and trust in the Lord. Abel did right and yet he died. That bothers us. That isn't the way things ought to be in our thinking. If you do right, then you ought to be rewarded and you ought to succeed. Being killed by your own brother doesn't seem like God was really watching out for him.

Hebrews 11 marches us through the lives of God's righteous people. They suffered. They had to make difficult choices. They pleased the Lord but often their lives were not what we would expect. We must move past the mentality of trying to make this place Heaven. It will never be. It's broken, marred with sin and dominated by Satan. God's people suffer. The righteous are chased down. Yet none of that changes a thing. God remains on the throne. The reward of the righteous is not a long life here, but an eternity with Him there.

And, dead Abel speaks. It would be easy to think, "Boy, I wouldn't want to be in his shoes." Killed by his own brother, what a terrible thing to happen. What a tough way to go. But look where Abel is. He is with the Lord. His life is honored by the God of Heaven and Earth. He heads the list of God's righteous ones. And, what is it that Abel says? He tells us to worship God the way God wants. He tells us to be faithful to God even when it is hard. He tells us not to compromise or look for short cuts. The easy and the convenient isn't always the best.

(OVER)

And this example of Abel reminds me, and it reminds all of us that have had faithful loved ones pass away, the example and the footprints for us to follow. I can still hear my mom telling me to drive with both hands on the wheel. But I remember how hard she worked. She was always busy. She always would sacrifice to make us happy. She always tried to get us to be the best that we could be. She loved us. She never got to hear me preach very much. My dad tells me, when he hears me preach, with a tear in his eyes, "your mom would be proud of you." I believe that.

And, with this, one must think about what impressions we are leaving for others. When we are no longer here, what will our family, friends and brethren be "hearing us speak?"

- How serious have we been in worshipping God? Have we played church all of our lives? Do we pay attention in worship? Is worship changing us?
- How careful have we been with God's word? Have we played spiritual dodge ball, jumping around passages that makes us uncomfortable?
- How much of a difference have we made in the lives of others and in the congregations that we are a part of? Have we left footprints for others to follow?
- Have we shown love, grace and forgiveness? Or, have we been a real pain in the lives of others? Have we been demanding, ready to throw the book at others? Have we been judgmental and always talking about the faults of others?
- Has our journey of faith been enjoyable and wonderful or have we made the image of Christianity miserable and tough?
- Have we made the lives of others better? Have we lifted the burdens of others? Have we engaged in good deeds that have helped others?
- Have we lived in such a way that people would say, "I wish I was like you?"

I am blessed to have fond memories, pleasant thoughts, and a wonderful example when I think about my mom. Not everyone has that with their parents. For some, it's been tough. For some, there have been more tears than joys. For some there has been no godly example and no footprints leading to Christ. For some, it's been a nightmare. That can color you, define you and describe you, or, you can realize that God has loved you, blessed you and been there for you all these years. It is God who saves you. It is God who has never let you down.

Dead, yet speaking...someday, that will be said of me and of you. Our lives will speak. What will people hear? It's time to put some thought and actions to this.

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)