



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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Matthew 16:18 "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it."

This is a powerful verse. It establishes that the church, or saved people, belong to Jesus. Church here is singular and possessive. It also shows that the rock points not to Peter but what Peter had just confessed. He said, **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16)**. That's the rock. That's what the church is built upon. The rock isn't Peter. He demonstrates trouble and fear just a few pages later in the Gospels. Our attention is drawn to the final statement, **"the gates of Hades shall not overpower it."** Old translations never used the word hades. Instead, the word Hell was used. So, in **Acts 2**, rather than stating that the soul of Jesus was not abandoned to Hades, these translations say Hell. Jesus had told that penitent thief that he would be with Jesus that very day in Paradise. Hell may be many things, but Paradise wouldn't be one of them. Jesus didn't go to Hell. In **Luke 16**, when the rich man died, in hades he lifted up his eyes being in torment. Again, those older translations use the word "hell." Hades is the place that the dead go until the final day when all are resurrected, a judgment takes place and then the eternity of Heaven and Hell is realized.

Our verse today is talking about death. Death will not overpower the church. When people die they go to Hades. Hades doesn't win. Death doesn't win.

Death is all around us. I need to go to two funeral homes on Thursday. Don't think I can make both. Death ends things. There are books that were never finished because the author died. There were symphonies that were never completed because the composer died. There were movies that had to be changed because an actor died before the filming was completed. Death leaves an empty chair. Death doesn't wait until we have finished all that we had planned. It doesn't wait until we are ready. It doesn't wait for us to get our finances in order. It doesn't wait for us to retire, finish school, or even see the grandkids. Death comes, whether we are ready or not.

But here, Jesus is saying, not even death can change the church. That is most remarkable. In everything else, death stops and ends things. Death ends a marriage. Death ends parenting. Death ends the reign of a king or queen. Death seems to stop all things, but one. God's church is not touched by death.

The death of John the baptist must have made Satan rejoice. The death of Stephen, a good day as Satan looks at things. Antipas, the apostle James, and so many others. Kill them. Crush them. Silence them. The thought of Satan is that destroy the people and you destroy the kingdom. But, it doesn't work that way. They are not destroyed. They are not "gone for good." They remain in the kingdom. They will reign with Christ.

(OVER)

They are viewed by Heaven as being victorious. A crown of victory, a reward, a gain, better off, those are not the words we would use of one that was crushed, defeated and destroyed. Yet, those are the very words God uses for His righteous ones. Death is nothing more than moving from one room to another in God's house. And, more than that, after death, Satan cannot touch these righteous ones ever again. He cannot tempt them. He cannot discourage them. He cannot accuse them. They are home, safe and sound.

When my kids lived at home and they were out with friends, I often lay in bed half awake, listening for them to come in. Once they were all in, safe and sound, it gave me wonderful relief and peace. Is it any different with God? He wants us to be safe and sound. While here, we are engaged in battle. We fight the good fight of faith. But once we have made it safely home, where we belong, all is fine.

The gates of hades shall not prevail. Paul tells the Corinthians that we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. That sleep there refers to the death of the righteous. Paul is saying that we, we Christians, shall not all die. Some will be alive when Jesus comes. There won't be a meteor smacking the planet and wiping out all of life. Global warming will not kill us all in twelve years. Christians will be alive on the planet when Christ comes.

Sometimes we can feel like we are losing the battle. More bad than good. More people are becoming indifferent, secular and careless about spiritual things. Too much sin. Too much filth. Too much blasphemy. Satan wants you to believe that it's a losing cause. He wants you to think that there is no hope. The odds are against us. There are too many on the other side. Satan wants you to just quit trying so hard and join up with him. Have fun, is what Satan wants you to believe. A little sin never hurt anyone, is what Satan says. Life is short, enjoy it. You deserve it. And, with all these false messages, comes one powerful truth from Heaven. The gates of Hades shall not prevail. Satan loses. Those walking with him will lose.

Satan's greatest pitch is death. And, Christ hit that out of the park a long time ago. Up from the grave He arose. And, because He is risen, so shall we be some day. What else does Satan have? It's a losing cause for him. And, the outcome is not yet, to be determined. It is determined. We know what will happen. Satan is going to be tormented for ever and the righteous will be gathered around the throne of God. That includes James, Antipas, Stephen, John and you and I some day.

Keep walking with the Savior. Keep your head up. Keep your eyes open. Keep believing. Even the gates of hades cannot prevail.

Good to know and good to remember...

Roger Shouse (used by permission)