



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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Jump Start # 2291

Proverbs 15:26 "Evil plans are an abomination to the Lord, but pleasant words are pure."

Jessie Smollett, a relatively unknown actor has been in the forefront of the news this past week. His plans certainly backfired. He was hoping the attention and the publicity would somehow give him a bump in pay. But, instead, he's out of a job. Our verse today, from a long time ago, reminds us of the trouble we face with the Lord when we plan and scheme to do wicked things.

Earlier in Proverbs, where we find the list of things that God hates, "a heart that devises wicked plans" is among them.

Some thoughts from this:

First, before the plans were formed, evil, wicked and wrong were thought about. A corrupt heart turns to corrupt thinking and planning. What has been in the news this past week, is nothing new. On smaller scales this happens all the time. Insurance fraud and medical fraud are nothing more than corrupt people trying to cheat the system to their own advantage. They are trying to get by, get ahead, and do things dishonestly. Some major cities will have a highway lane that is designated for carpool riders, at least two people are to be in the car when on that lane. People try to cheat that system. There have been those who put manikins in the passenger seat to make it look like another person. Long before the plans are formed, the thoughts are there.

Second, when folks get caught, and they usually do, the trouble, punishment and fines are a whole lot worse than what they gained from cheating. This is true in school. A student will come up with all kinds of ways to disguise his cheating. Rather than spend that same amount of time studying, he devises evil. When caught, the consequences sometimes are more than an F on the test. In some settings, he fails the course and sometimes is expelled from the school. What happened was far worse than what he would have gained by cheating.

Third, the Lord already knows what is going on. There is no mocking God as the N.T. teaches. We can fool others and we can even deceive ourselves, but God knows. He knows our motives, our intentions and our heart. There is no getting around God. A person may literally get away with murder, at least here and for a while, but he never truly gets away with it. He will face God one day. God knows.

Fourth, those that cheat, have a low regard for others. There are those who try to cheat in business. There are those who try to sell inferior or even broken products. Why? Their selfish hearts only think about self. They want to make some money and they do not care if someone else is hurt.

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The Lord told us that the second greatest commandment was to love your neighbor as yourself. **(Matt. 22:39)** This goes out the window when a person is planning evil and wicked. That selfish, indifferent attitude doesn't set well with the Lord. It is just the opposite of what He is. The N.T. teaches us to be kind, gentle, forgiving, engaging in good deeds and loving. All of these great qualities and characteristics are directed towards how we treat others. A person can't be wrong with others and right with God. Remember that golden rule? **(Matt. 7:12)** That is forgotten when one plans evil.

Fifth, it's hard to restore name, reputation and trust after one has been caught cheating and planning evil. People become suspicious. People don't want to include you in places where integrity and honesty are demanded. For some, they will always be known by the evil that they planned. Their deeds taint them and people remember. Selfishness and greed come with a price. That price may simple be that you find it hard to get a job. That price may be that you can't get accepted into a school. That price may be that you lose friends and even family relationships. There are a lot of things much more important and valuable than a bump up in salary. And, to climb on people to get that, is a terrible and wicked way to accomplish that.

Rather than laying awake in bed, wondering what you would do if you could rob a bank, put your thoughts to good, useful and helpful things. Paul tells us to let our minds dwell upon what is lovely, pure and right. **(Phil. 4:8)** Chase those thoughts away and think about how you can help the church. When you walk into a store or your place of work, what do you notice right away? How is it appealing to a visitor? Share those ideas with those at church. Be thinking of ways to get the word of God out on social media. Think about ways to reach more overseas. Pour your thoughts, your energies into constructive, godly and useful ways to improve things.

Hollywood glamorizes the one who devises wicked plans. Breaking the law, breaking the rules, stepping on others to lie, cheat and steal, is the basis of so many movies. Wicked plans. Wicked people. And, as our culture sits there and takes in all of those images, is it any wonder that some turn those images into real plans. They stockpile weapons and ammo and then plan how to shoot up a school or church. They make plans to cheat insurance companies. They come up with ways to fool the corporate bosses so they can get paid when there is nothing wrong with them.

Rather than feeding our hearts upon glamorized plans that are wicked, we need to fill our minds and hearts with the goodness of the Gospel. What is truly missing in the Jessie Smollett story is a heart that was void of Jesus. His hatred, prejudice and wicked plans came from a heart that has no focus and no direction. Rather than using his influence for good, he chose evil. Rather than promoting unity in a torn city, he added to the division and hatred. Rather than being known as a great actor, Jessie Smollett has become the poster boy of someone who plans evil. His name, unknown to most in this country, has been the illustration of so many sermons recently. Rather than getting praise and adoration, he is scorned and mocked as a fool who lives without God. His plans backfired, as most wicked plans eventually do.

Just what is it that you think about? What do you day dream about? What are your wishes? The quality of your heart tells the answer.

Roger Shouse
