



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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Luke 9:23 *"And He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.'"*

I've been preaching a series entitled, "Ten Things." And, as the title suggests, each lesson has ten practical, put on your kitchen table type of points. We've talked about 'Ten things you need to know before you get married.' That was followed by, 'Ten Things Parents Need to Tell Their Teens.' This past Sunday, it was, 'Ten Things That Can Help Your Marriage.' It was in that last one, about helping your marriage, that one of the points was marriage is lived one day at a time. How do folks stay married 50 or more years? It was one day at a time. There are good days and bad days. There are days you want to forget and days you never want to forget. There are plain ole' every day days and there are special days. Happy days and sad days. Days you did well and days you did not do so well.

That thought actually is the same for living the Christian life. Ours is a journey. It's not one big thing. It's not the going overseas and spending a few weeks with third world people. It's living for Jesus everyday. That thought is born from our verse today. Discipleship as defined by Jesus is composed of three elements. First, denying self. That must come first. If it's not first, the other two won't follow. Denying self is hard. We like self. We like to do what we like to do. We like to make ourselves happy. We don't like to do what is uncomfortable to us. This is why Jesus starts here. It's kingdom first. It's Jesus first. It's 'Thy will be done.' Self must be shoved to the back and kept there. It keeps wanting to pop up. It keeps wanting to move to the front. I don't feel like going to church services, is what self sometimes says. Probably not some days. But if I have denied self, I will get down to the church house. There are days when you don't feel like doing good deeds. Yep. We've all been there. Love to stay home, lay on the couch, watch a ballgame and forget about the world. But others need us. Deny self. Take care of others first. Be the servant.

Next comes our day to day. Take up your cross daily. Several things here. First, crosses were instruments of death, sacrifice. When one went to the cross, they weren't coming back home. Even Jesus went to the tomb after the cross. The grave couldn't hold him, but it was to the grave He went. To the first century pagan, the cross simply meant that the State was executing someone.

(OVER)

To the disciple, the cross took his mind to Jesus. The cross of Jesus was more than death, it was a sacrifice. Jesus gave up His life. So, to be a disciple, I must take up my cross daily. Notice, it's not Jesus' cross. That has already been carried. Every year around Easter, someone is pictured carrying a large wooden cross down the road. He's not Jesus, and that's not what Jesus meant in this passage. We don't carry Jesus' cross. We carry our cross.

Now, what did Jesus sacrifice? Like the O.T. lamb, He was pure, innocent, holy and good. We can't be like Jesus in those ways completely, but our sacrifice is given to God. Our sacrifice isn't bad stuff, but good things. Our sacrifice are things that we are able to offer. Some will say having a handicapped child is the cross that they bear. It may be a burden, but not a cross. You didn't choose that. You had no say in that. Others will say living with a drunk is the cross they bear. No. drunkenness is a sin that needs to be repented of, not a sacrifice.

Unlike Jesus, our sacrifice is daily. Jesus carried His cross once. We carry ours daily. Every day. Every day carrying that cross. Every day making a sacrifice for the Lord. Christianity is much, much more than being saved. It's more than accepting Christ and believing. That's the starting point. Now, it's what do I do everyday. Not just Sundays, but Friday nights. Not just Wednesday evening Bible study, but Saturday afternoon at the ballgame.

Daily. That's one of the best word descriptions of what our journey to Heaven is like. It's following Jesus daily. It's thinking about the Lord, daily. It's reading God's word, daily. It's praying daily. It's being busy in the kingdom, daily. It's making sacrifices, daily. It's more than giving up a few Sundays to teach the kids Bible class. That's great. But what happens after the quarter ends? What happens between those Sundays?

Marriage is lived every day. Our walk with Jesus is following Him every day. Like I said above regarding marriage, the same fits with our discipleship with Jesus. There are some great days. There are some days that are not so great. There are some moments that I never want to forget. There are others that I want to never remember. There are many average, every day plain days. There are sad days. There are joyful days. It's a journey of a lifetime.

You think about how long you have been a Christian. How many hymns do you imagine you have sung so far? A thousand? Ten Thousand? How many sermons have you listened to? How many times have you taken the Lord's Supper? If you could add up every contribution that you have given, how much would that amount to? A thousand dollars? A hundred thousand dollars? How many prayers have you personally prayed since you were a Christian? How many verses have you read?

I expect if we could see on a piece of paper those numbers we would be shocked at the large amount. It's living for Jesus each day. Sundays are special because we get to be with each other, remember the Lord's death and hear powerful sermons. But Tuesdays are also important. Every day is part of our journey. Every day is a time to take up our cross. Every day we follow Jesus.

One day at a time...

That includes TODAY.

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)