



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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John 10:10 "The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly."

As we continue with our journey on my reflections from a trip to Israel, our attention turns to the massive Dead Sea, sometimes called the Salt Sea. Surrounded by mountains, the Dead Sea stretches for miles and miles. One can see where the sea is shrinking. A hotel built years ago right on the edges of water now sits a long way off from where the water is. The Israeli government has found a way to use the water for irrigation by removing the high salt and mineral content. And, yes, one can float easily in that water. It is 30% salt and is called Dead because no plant life and no fish live in the water. One does not see any boats on that water, the mineral content would be harmful to boats. The area around the Dead Sea is remarkably different than around Galilee. The Dead Sea sits in a desert. It's arid and hot. The day we were there the temperature reached 108.

The Dead Sea is a powerful contrast and lesson for us. It is beautiful to look at. Sunsets are great photo opportunities. However, the sea is lifeless. It's dead. One would get sick if they drank the water. Our guides told us that if we wanted to float in the sea, to bring clothes that could be thrown away. And, what a living illustration and reminder for us of what is truly important in life.

There are so many who look great on the outside. They spend tons of money on clothing, fashion, makeup, hair products and even plastic surgery just to get that right image. They want to look good. Hollywood is built upon that fable. The covers of magazines are those who are so beautiful on the outside. But like that Dead Sea in Israel, so often, there is nothing on the inside. The beauty of the eyes cannot cover up a heart that is twisted with hatred, selfishness and indifference. The wrappings look great, but inside is nothing. No depth of spirituality. No love for the Lord. No longing for righteousness. Empty. Shallow. Dead.

Paul referred to some widows as being dead while they live. Jesus came to give life and give it abundantly (John 10:10). That life brings joy, hope, sunshine to the inside of the heart and a smile to the outside of the face.

(OVER)

Heaven Bound, is a destination that God's people long for. Being part of a God's kingdom and among God's family is a joy that the world does not understand nor appreciate.

Dead while alive. Looking good but lifeless on the inside. Let's put some thoughts to that.

First, without Christ we become lifeless. It is the Lord that brings grace, joy and forgiveness before us and we learn to embrace those qualities and use those in our lives. Without Jesus, it's just every man for himself. And, self becomes the new god. Devoted to self. Devoted to looks. Devoted to satisfying self. Devoted to doing whatever one feels like.

Sometimes it's hard for righteous people to understand the choices of the unrighteous. Why drink to become drunk? Why purposely do something that is going to make you feel terrible afterwards? Why take drugs knowing that you are likely to become addicted and may never be free from it? But living without Christ, a person doesn't think about consequences, influences, or what these choices might do to them. It's all about the moment. It's about now. It's about self.

Second, the measure of success is not exterior but interior. Jesus summed it up with, what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul. A large house. A fleet of expensive cars. Fine dining. These thoughts soon take us to the rich man in Luke 16. He ate well. He dressed well. He lived in a fine place. None of those things could keep death away. He died. He went to torment. He now became a beggar like Lazarus once was. Some of the first Christians were slaves. Most were very poor. Even in early American history, so many lived in tiny log cabins. The measure of success is faith and walking with the Lord. Having blessings may make the journey smoother, but with blessings comes responsibilities and obligations. Help others. Share. Be generous. The world is attracted to the exterior of life. Our focus must be on the interior. Faith, character, direction and purpose—without these, one looks like the Dead Sea.

Third, through Jesus, the dead can become alive. We see this literally as Jesus raised the dead. But we experience this personally as Jesus changes our lives. Our attention turns to the spiritual side of life. We are more interested in Heaven than here. We understand the value of worship and long to be among the people of God. All of us at one time were dead, but through Christ we have risen to walk in a new life. It's a better life. It's life the way that God intended. While the world around us is impressed with stuff, what catches our attention is character, kindness and service. The dead can live through Jesus. It's much more than adding church services to a busy schedule. It's rewiring the house. It's thinking differently. It's inviting Jesus in and allowing the Lord to be the Lord of our lives. It's confidence, hope and a longing to spend forever with the Lord. "I once was lost, but now I'm found," are the words of that Amazing Grace. We who were dead once, can help others find life in Jesus Christ. Forgiveness, hope, peace and joy—what blessings those are when one is walking with Jesus.

The Dead Sea—beautiful to look at—but lifeless and dead. Make sure your life is not a mirror of that.

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)
