



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)

Aug. 8, 2021

Jump Start # 2876

Proverbs 15:13 "A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken."

He sat across from me at the airport. He was a young man. His hair was blue—that's right, blue. He wore a t-shirt that said, "Death wish." He had two large earrings—satanic symbols. On his knee was a patch that read, "Bombing victims." His clothing was all black. His spirit was dark. We made eye contact. I smiled. He didn't. He was glued to his phone while he awaited his flight.

Everything about that young man seemed sad. He left the impression that he was angry and maybe even had a chip on his shoulder. I thought, to be so young and to be in such a dark place as he was. We never got to talk. I don't know his story. Maybe life threw him some curves that he was not prepared for. Maybe the atmosphere of godless people in his life turned him away from the loving grace of Jesus Christ.

Jesus loved that young man as much as He loves you and I. Some people get themselves in such a deep, deep hole, that they can't see the way out. In contrast, I spent the week with a powerful Texas church in a lectureship. I was preaching literally morning and night, back and forth for four days. Four speakers—a total of 16 sermons in four days. And, each evening were two rows of young people. Smiling. Polite. Kind. They had their Bibles with them. They engaged in wonderful singing and praising the Lord. I suppose the young man at the airport would think what we were doing in the church building was boring. But what a difference in expression, atmosphere and influence. The kids at the church were joyful, happy and glad to be there. My airport person was just the opposite. He looked like he had been eating sour pickles for a long, long time.

Our verse today, borrowed from the King James translation, is about our countenance or expression, as other translations express it. A cheerful face, the New American Standard says, comes from a joyful heart. When the heart is sad, the spirit is broken, is how the verse concludes. Two hearts—sad or cheerful. Two expressions—cheerful or broken. Now, why is it that way?

(OVER)

First, some would say that the expression upon their face and the feeling in their heart is based upon what has happened to them in life. One was blessed and the other cursed. One has had an easy life, the other a hard and difficult way. One got what it wanted and the other didn't. That's the most common explanation and the one that is most often accepted.

However, the problem with that thinking is that it puts us not at the driver's seat of life. We are simply going along for the ride. We cannot control what happens to us. Trials and sufferings often come upon the innocent. So, this really makes our passage today rather useless. If you can't help what happens to you, then happy or sad, it's not your fault and you are unable to do anything about that.

We know that this explanation isn't valid. There has arisen out of the ashes of turmoil and trouble those who have smiled, been joyous and refused to be defeated or held down. Likewise, we know there are those who had every advantage, blessing and good fortune come their way, and yet they remain sad, ungrateful, sour and miserable.

Second, the condition of our heart determines whether or not there is a smile on our face or if sadness follows us. And, the condition of our heart is completely up to us. We can change our heart. We can change our thinking. This is why the Philippians were told to rejoice. That was within their capability. They could do that if they chose to do that. Be joyful is a command that comes from the apostle. Yet, had the people replied, we'd love to, but we can't. We can't because we are persecuted, or we are poor, or we are troubled by Romans and Jews, then being joyful is based upon circumstances.

We can turn our hearts, change our hearts, influence our hearts, strengthen our hearts and from that we influence the temperature of our lives. Some folks are angry. They are always angry. Nothing is ever right. Some complain. Always complaining. Some have their own little pity party. They always feel left out, over looked, unloved and neglected. Yet, others are cheerful, encouraging, delightful and helpful. Your heart sets the tone of your face.

Third, Jesus makes all the difference. It doesn't matter where you are, what the weather's like, what the politics are, how easy things are or how hard things are, the grace, love and salvation in Jesus make all the difference. This world is broken. Heaven is not. This world doesn't have any solutions or answers. Heaven does. This world has left God and is spinning out of control. Heaven hasn't. This world is plagued with sin. Heaven is not.

So where is our eyes set? Upon the world or upon Heaven? God has never deserted us. God will forgive us. God will always love us. God has prepared a way for us.

Smiling in the church building or pouting in an airport. It wasn't the location, but the disposition of their hearts. I expect the young people I saw at worship would have been joyful and happy even in an airport.

It sure makes us wonder about ourselves, doesn't it? Do we rejoice to see one another or are we long faced? Heaven bound or stuck in the mire of misery? It's a choice. Which do you choose?

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)

