



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 #3156

1 Samuel 3:1 “Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord before Eli. And word from the Lord was rare in those days, visions were infrequent.”

Our verse today is the background story to when God called Samuel. For a long, long time, Samuel would serve as God’s faithful prophet, anointing the first kings of Israel. But this is how the story began. And, in this passage, we are told that the word of the Lord was rare in those days.

Truth be told, the words from Heaven were often rare. I tend to believe that so many have the idea that God spoke nearly everyday and to everyone in Bible times. The concept some have is that God was chatty and talked and talked and talked. But have you noticed that many “heroes” of the Bible never heard directly from God. Caleb, Esther, Mordecai, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, there is no indication that God spoke directly to them.

Now, contrast that fact with examples such as the 2012 Passion Conference in Atlanta, which was attended by 40,000 people. The who’s who of modern preachers, such as John Piper, Beth Moore and Francis Chan highlighted the conference. The audience was asked “How many of you heard the voice of God speak specifically, clearly, directly and personally to you? I’d like you to share it. Can you put up a hand for a minute? Just look around; that’s people saying, ‘God Almighty, the Maker of Heaven—He spoke to me. He spoke to me. God spoke to me.’” And, hundreds and hundreds held their hands high in the air. And, as shocking as that is, many among our own brethren are now saying similar things. There has been a gentle shift away from faith and towards feelings. And, with that shift, a movement away from the written word of God to what a person thinks God tells them. A divine nudge and a trusting in what one feels more than what one knows. Where this leads to is a person saying, “I know what the Bible says, yet I feel God wants me to do this.” And, with that, feelings top faith and my inner self tops what the Bible says. “I feel that God wants me to be happy,” so someone who feels trapped in a marriage, looks for the exit door. They do this believing that God approves of their decision and actions. They couldn’t put a verse on what they are doing, but they sure could put a mountain of feelings.

(OVER)

Some thoughts about this:

First, this ought to alarm us. Those that lead God's people need to be watching for these things. Shifting away from the written word is a step away from God. Our faith is not based upon feelings but upon the word of God. The Bereans didn't just know what Paul said was true, they searched the Scriptures to see. Listen to what is being said in Bible classes. See what people are posting on Facebook. The religious culture around us is influencing many, many disciples. What are people reading? Do you know? A steady diet of Beth Moore, Francis Chan and the like is nothing more than spiritual junk food.

Second, there is a place for feelings in our walk and worship with the Lord. Some have gone so far the other way that they sit like a zombie during worship. No emotions and no feelings is not the answer here. A child one day was standing in the pew smiling and waving at the people behind her. The child's mother pulled her down, and slapped her leg. The child started to cry and the mother said, "that's more like it." No, it's not. We ought to be happy, smiling and enjoying our fellowship with the Lord and His people. The Ethiopian went on his way rejoicing after he was baptized. Some would frown on that. Some would declare, "there's no rejoicing in this place." And, that sour spirit and expressionless look upon our faces is why some young people run to the other extreme. How can we sing, "I'm happy today, I'm happy today," without a smile on your face?

Third, God never uses feelings as the determination of what is right or wrong or His acceptance of us. Many a person has said, "I feel saved." The Bible was written to establish the fact that Jesus died for our sins. The death of Jesus is told as a matter of fact. If man were writing that, we'd have pages and pages of emotions, tears and feelings. John wrote in his letter, "when you read these things" you'll know you are saved. That's the way God does things.

Feelings can be misleading. How many times have we driven somewhere, thinking we knew where we were, only we didn't. A wife can watch a Hallmark Christmas movie and tear up. Her husband is so bored, he's checking his phone. We can stand in front of a modern piece of art and the guide can tell us about the pain the artist was feeling and how this portrait shows the drama between the working class and the political power structure. You and I looking at that same painting think the artist sneezed in his paint bucket. We don't see any of that. We don't feel the artist pain. We think a three-year-old can draw better than that. Feelings are misleading. Feelings are not the same. Feelings can change.

God chose to communicate through words. Words have definite meaning. Words can be explained. Words can be copied. Words can be translated. Words can be understood. Words stand the test of time. God chose words.

And, when words collide with our feelings, it is the words of God that are correct. We may not feel like going to worship, but we know we should. We may not feel like forgiving someone, but we know we should. We may not feel like helping someone out, but we know we should.

· Paul told the Ephesians, when you read what I wrote, you will know my insight into the mystery of Christ (3:4).

· John said, "I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13).

God told His servants to preach the word.

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)