



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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Hebrews 10:31 "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Through the years we have somehow lost the fear of God. God is love we are told. What a friend we have in Jesus, we sing. We know that sin is wrong and that we shouldn't do it, but we are no longer afraid. Grace is everywhere and somehow we'll get out of every mess we've created. And, this attitude has taken the fire out of God.

Contextually, the writer of our verse today is warning about sinning on purpose. We do something wrong, knowing that it is wrong, but thinking that God will forgive us. He has to forgive us. He almost owes us forgiveness, even though we'd never say it that way. So, this casualness towards sin has lessened the impact of the consequences. It is a terrifying thing. Terror. Fearful. Scared. Those are the words that other translations use for this passage. And, those words are simply missing today when we think about God. God is my friend, we say. There's nothing to be afraid of. And, maybe a dose of fear is what we need these days. The Puritan preacher, Jonathan Edwards, preached, "Sinners in the hands of an angry God." The audience was crying in fear. Today, that kind of preaching wouldn't fly in most places. We want sermons that describe us walking hand in hand with God. We want sermons that makes us feel good. We don't want to leave worship scared. We want to sing, "I'm happy today, oh, yes, I'm happy today." And, what has happened is that the fear of God has disappeared. We can say anything and do anything and God might frown a bit, but He won't be angry with us. We've made "falling into the hands of a living God" a delightful experience.

And, why is it terrifying?

First, because there is no higher power than God. One cannot appeal to someone else. It's not like a ballgame and a call by the officials is questioned and the videos are reviewed and what was called on the field could be overturned. That may work in sports, but not with God. And, in this way, it makes falling into God's hands, unprepared, whether in actions or attitudes, a terrifying thing. God is merciful but God is also just. If you don't agree with the call of God, there is no other place, no other person, no other resource you can go to. God is always right. ALWAYS. God is always fair. ALWAYS. When God told Hezekiah to get his house in order because he was going to die, there is no one other than God that he could turn to.

Second, God's law is the ultimate rule of right and wrong. His word will not be appealed, updated, amended or changed. It doesn't matter what we want. It doesn't matter what culture demands. It doesn't matter, and that's the point!

Third, God's condemnation is the worst thing that could ever happen. It won't be for a few hours standing in the corner. It's not going to bed without supper. It's not having your mouth washed with soap. It's not a spanking. It's not taking away privileges. Those all last for a short period of time and usually things are restored back to normal. The punishment of God is forever. It never ends. It doesn't stop, EVER. There is no restoring of things as they once were.

Fourth, it is terrifying because it doesn't have to be this way. The rich man in Luke 16 did not have to be in agony. The rich farmer who wanted to have larger barns, did not have to die without God. It was the choices that they made. The most terrifying aspect of the terror of God is that we put ourselves in that position. God is not randomly pulling us out of class and sending us to the principal's office. Our choices. Our attitudes. Our lack of obedience. Our ignoring the law of God. Our arrogance. Our selfishness. Our refusal to bow to the God of Heaven and earth. It's terrifying because we have put ourselves there. We have lived with a closed Bible. We have ignored worship. We have done what we wanted to do. And, by that we are falling into the hands of a living God. What terror beholds us. What long judgment awaits us. And, all of this could have been prevented had we chosen to walk with the Savior.

Jesus died so that we would not have to perish. But many will, because they have lived as if there is no God.

For those who walk with the Lord, God is our friend. God's grace saves us. God is there for us. But for those who want to believe that God isn't, they will find what a terrifying thing it is to fall into His living hands.

Maybe it's time to blow the dust off of some old sermons about judgment and Hell. Maybe it's time to remind ourselves that God is serious, are we?

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