



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)

Jan. 15, 2023

Jump Start # 2883

1 Peter 1:16 "because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"

In Israel we visited many archaeological sites that have uncovered settlements, fortified walls, temples, palaces, wine presses, synagogues, and homes. Common to so many of these places was purification baths. Large rectangular stone line structures were used for Jews to purify themselves before they went to worship. The priest would purify themselves. There were even places in Jerusalem to purify animals before they were sacrificed. Making oneself pure before he came into worship was an essential aspect of the Old Testament system of faith and religion. A way to purify the people was found in most of these places we visited.

And all of that sure makes us think about our own way of worshipping God. Ancient Israel purified the outside by going to these purification pools. We must purify our hearts and our minds. The Psalms asked, "Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord and who may stand in His holy place?" The answer follows: "He who has clean hands and a pure heart.." James said to "cleanse your hands and purify your hearts."

The purification pools reminded us that Israel just didn't hop into worship and then go on their way. There was a tedious and ritual cleansing that took place first. They put time into doing this so that they could worship. This makes us wonder if we "rush" through worship too quickly and if we are putting any prep time into getting ready for worship? Are our heads, hearts and minds ready to worship? Work, kids, household projects, sports can occupy our conversations and our time before worship. We can be so busily talking about here and now things that it's hard to get focused upon the words we are singing or the prayers that are offered to God. Little preparation is given to our worship. It is so easy just to show up, with our minds and hearts filled with secular things that our attention to the Lord isn't the best.

So, what are some good prep suggestions before worship:

First, get there early. The opposite of early is late. Late makes you rush. Late puts you in the stress mode. With little ones, it is hard to be anything but late, but it can be done. I've seen it done. So, Saturday night have everything lined up and ready to go for worship the next day. Find the Bibles, the shoes, get outfits ironed and ready to go. Get to bed early on Saturday night. That's hard for some families but when you don't, sleepy is what we give the Lord. In bed early on Saturday and up and ready to go on Sunday. Make Sunday the best day of the week around your house. Talk about Sunday on other days.

(OVER)

Then arrive early at the church house. This gives you time to get focused, read some passages, look at some hymns, fellowship some brethren and be ready to give your God your best.

Second, as Israel went to the purification pools, you strive and set your mind to be pure before the Lord. Focus upon the Spiritual. Put away worldly thoughts. Pray. Ask for forgiveness. Enter worship with a pure heart and a pure mind. Put up guards around those things that are distracting to you. Count your blessings. Pray for your church family. Pray for those you know who are not saved.

Third, get into God's word quickly and deeply. God's word will pull you into a spiritual mindset. It will help you to think about the things above. It will help you to be pure and righteous. Read some passages before you leave your house. Bring your Bible. Bring a pen. Anticipate writing something down. Focus upon the Holy Jesus who loves you and died for you.

Fourth, focus upon the goodness of the Lord. It is easy to get our minds thinking about things that do not matter. We see who comes in late. We see who is sitting with who. We see how long the preacher preached. We see new cars in the parking lot. We see so many things, and all of those things can take our minds and thoughts to other places. Look at how many came and how many love the Lord. Look at the wonderful words of the hymns. Look at all the blessings around us. Godly shepherds. Deacons with a servant heart. Preachers who love the word and love telling that old, old story of Jesus Christ to others. Look what the Lord has done for you. Look at how many times He has blessed you, forgiven you and been there for you.

It's like the poem: Two prisoners sat looking through the bars,
One saw the mud and the other saw the stars.

Perspective. Vision. Blessings. Gratitude. Faith. That's our purification pools today. We need to dip in them. We need to spend some time around them. We need to give our best to the Lord because He not only deserves the best, but He gave us the best—Jesus Christ.

Purification—it sure helps with our worship.

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)
