



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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Joshua 4:6 "Let this be a sign among you, so that when your children ask later saying 'What do these stones mean to you?'"

Our verse comes from that wonderful time when Israel was finally going to cross the Jordan River and enter the promise land. As the river parted, twelve stones were to be picked up from the river bottom. These stones were to be carried on the shoulders and there was to be one stone for each of the tribes. This was a memorial, a reminder. Years later, as our verse implies, when your children ask about those rocks, they were to be told the story of God's deliverance, providence, protection and power. The waters parted and we entered.

But something stands out about these words to me. The passage says, "When your children ask later..." Consider some thoughts:

First, why would children even ask about rocks? Implied is that these rocks were set aside in a special way. Some have thought that the rocks were put on top of one another like a pillar. These were not just rocks along the road or in a garden. I've been to that area. There are a lot of rocks. So, parents would have shown their children these rocks. This was something special. This was part of their history as a family, as a nation and spiritually. We may take our kids to national monuments or battlefields and when we do that we have a discussion. We put a context to why these things are important.

Here, it seems that the parents were deliberate in showing these rocks to their children. There was a spiritual lesson to be taught and understood. A legacy was being formed. This also implies that this was important to the parents. The parents wanted their children to know what happened. The rocks were not sacred. The rocks were not to be worshipped. The rocks were not God. However, the rocks were important. Our Lord's Supper could be that way. A rock is a rock. Grape juice is grape juice. It's where that rock came from that made it significant. It's what that grape juice represents is what makes it significant.

A spiritual lesson came from a rock. A reminder. A connection.

(OVER)

Second, obviously, those rocks were saved. Later on, implies later on. Once the rocks were carried to the other side, they weren't tossed aside, broken up into gravel, or thrown down a hill. They were saved. They were preserved. Being a history nut as I am, I like it when congregations hang on to a piece of their past. I was in one church building that had old wooden contribution plate hanging on the wall. There was a card with the history of that on the inside. In my office, I have one of the original pulpits from our congregation's early history. The children would not ask about the rocks, unless they could see the rocks. In my dream world, I've love to see down some hall way of a church building the photos of former elders and preachers. Reminders. The children saw the rocks.

Third, as the big people were telling the little people about those rocks, it would help the big ones. We tend to forget. We tend to move on and move away from those earlier lessons. But having to tell someone else takes us back and it helps us to remember as well. This is why teaching the Bible is so valuable. It not only opens the eyes of the one being taught, but it reminds the one who is teaching. We can forget. And, whether we are teaching a Bible class at the church building, teaching a friend over the kitchen table, or are at home and teaching our kids, going over those verses and putting them in a format to teach is valuable. I was asked this recently by a parent. Their question to me was, "How do you tell a five-year-old the difference between a king and a judge." Well, I know that answer, but I had to think. I had to put it in a way that I would teach a five year old. Teaching about those rocks helped the big ones as well as the little ones who learned.

Fourth, we are not told what happened to those rocks. I suppose they could be still there somewhere. Rocks don't seem to go away. But as those first children heard those lessons, it was important for them to teach their children. But, we know what happened in Biblical history. As the nation crossed the Jordan, it moved in and spread throughout the territory. The book of Judges begins by telling us that Joshua's generation was faithful to the Lord. Then arose, another generation that did not know the Lord. Could that be these children? Could it be that they never returned to look at these rocks again. The wheels fall off. Idols are introduced. The nation drifts from God. Foreign armies come to punish God's people. Judges arose who delivered the nation from the oppressors. But a cycle is repeated over and over for four hundred years. Why was there a generation that did not know the Lord? Would a visit to some rocks have changed that? Had they outgrown rocks? Were they too smart for rocks? They forgot how it all began and as a result, they left the Lord. Maybe it's good for us to return to some rocks for us. Maybe we need our children to teach these same lessons to their children.

What do these stones mean? Great question. We can only hope that our children will be asking similar questions and that we can answer them.

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)
