



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 # 1153

Psalms 100:4 "Enter His gate with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name."

This Psalm is a beautiful worship passage. It is packed with emotions, such as "shout joyfully to the Lord," "serve the Lord with gladness," "come before Him with joyful singing." This chapter reminds us of the greatness of worship. It is a good thing to worship God. Worship not only pleases the Lord, it does wonderful things for us. It has a way of clearing our heads, getting our priorities back in order, encouraging us and reminding us that we are not alone in this journey to Heaven. Worship fills the heart and drives out fears and worries. This is one reason I just love Sundays. It's the best day of the week for me.

We've been spending a lot of class lessons recently on the excellence of worship. Recently, this chapter and especially this verse was given some thought. It is believed that this Psalm was written for those who were traveling to Jerusalem to worship. Ancient Israel was required to gather to Jerusalem, at least three times a year for holy days. The background behind this chapter is that this is something that the travelers would repeat as they walked along the roadways toward the city. Notice how the language supports this idea:

- Come before Him (2)
- Enter His gates (4)
- And His courts (4)

As they journeyed toward Jerusalem, they weren't just walking, nor talking about business or life, someone in the group would say loudly, "Shout joyfully to the Lord," and that would start a series of wonderful and thoughtful and thankful words to God. You can imagine someone shouting, "Great is the Lord," followed by someone else saying, "Mighty are His works." "His loving kindness is everlasting." "Our God is awesome." On and on that would go, until someone would say, "Come before Him with joyful singing." Then the songs would begin. The journey didn't seem so long that way. They were filling their hearts and minds with the Lord. They were getting ready to worship that way. They were worshipping before they came to worship.

In many ways, this was a "Pre-worship" routine. Before they arrived in Jerusalem, they were worshipping. And all of that brings these things to us. Do we have a "pre-worship"? Could it be our worship suffers because we are not "coming before Him with joyful singing?"

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Consider, if our Sunday morning is filled with TV or secular music and then we step into the church building, it may be hard to switch gears. Try filling Sunday morning with spiritual activities. No TV. No newspapers. No radio. No emals. No facebook. Start with prayers. Sing on the way to the church house. Go around and count our blessings, name them one by one. Use the time to play Bible games, naming the books of the Bible, naming the apostles and such things.

Actually, our "Pre-worship" begins on Saturday. The events of Saturday set the tone for Sunday. Staying up late on Saturday can kill Sunday. Sleepy worship is certainly not giving God our best. God is great and He deserves our best each time. Those that participate need to be polished, ready and leading the congregation the best that they can. This is not amateur hour. This is not the time to "wing-it." We are worshipping God. Just as the High Priest had to put on special garments and purify himself before he served, so we ought to come before the Lord in readiness. The father of John the Baptist was serving in the temple when God sent him a message about his wife's conception. He was serving according to his order. There were so many priests that the opportunity to actually be in the temple may have come only once in his life. What an honor that would have been. And then to think, what an honor it would have been to carry the ark of the covenant. Those examples show the privilege of serving the Lord. Our passage shows the joy of being able to come to worship. Giving God our best is something that needs to burn deeply within us.

Pre-worship begins on Saturday. It is our "preparation" day. The day to get ready for worship. Parents, on Saturday evening, you need to lay out all the clothes, find the shoes, Bibles, get everything ironed and be ready for Sunday morning. It's too crazy to be looking for shoes and stuff when it's time to walk out the door. That makes everyone rushed, late and upset before worship. Give God our best.

Pre-worship means, looking over Bible lessons on Saturday. Reminding ourselves of the text. Filling out class books. Thinking ahead for the next day. Give God our best. Those that teach can tell who is prepared and who is clueless. The clueless crowd must ask themselves, are we giving God our best?

Pre-worship means getting to bed at a decent hour on Saturday evening. It's not the time to stay up until two or three in the morning. Is that giving God our best the next day?

Pre-worship means our worship begins as we journey to the church building. Like this passage illustrates, shout out to the Lord. Sing joyfully to the Lord. Fill the time with good thoughts. Arrive early. Be a friendly greeter. Enjoy the time with God's people. Make the most of your worship. Don't be in a hurry to leave. Don't miss the amazing encouragement that comes from hugging your church family.

Give God your best-each time. This is true for all of us. The preacher, the folks that turn on the lights, the men that lead, those that sit in the pews. Sing your best. Pray your best. Praise your best. God is deserving of your best. Tired, worn-out and stale worship is about as inviting as old bread. UGH. Toss it out. Start fresh. Give it your best. Make sure the mics work, the lights turn on, the building is dusted and ready to give God our best. Song leaders practice. Preacher make sure everything is in order and go over and over your notes. Men that lead in prayer, think about what you are going to say. Give it thought. All of us, give God our best.

The way we worship sets a tone for others. It tells visitors how serious we are and it teaches our children lessons. The days of sleeping in church are over. The days of texting, playing games on our phones are over. Unless you are medical staff, why do we need our phones in church? Leave them in the car. If you miss a call, get back to them after worship is over. Are things THAT important? Give God our best!

There is a pull among some younger Christians to change worship. Come casual, they cry. Even in 'jama pants. They are missing something. It's not the outside, but the inside that's not right. Come with reverence. Come before the Almighty. Come with your best. Best attitude. Best words. Best clothes. Best behavior. You are coming before the Lord. Give it thought. Give it your best. It's not about you, it's about God. It's time we put God back into worship and gave Him our best. Don't try new songs during worship. That's not the time for that. Don't use prayer as a time to push your agenda. Don't preach old, tired sermons that do nothing. Put your heart into what you are doing. Think. Think of God. Think of the audience. Give it your best. Get there early. Be ready to serve. God deserves your best.

Just love Sunday. Do you? When you are working hard to make it the best, you just gotta love it. When you see God, you just gotta love it. Don't you wish everyday was Sunday? I do.

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)

