



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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Numbers 14:1 *“Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night.”*

The twelve spies that Moses had sent into Canaan returned. They had been gone for a long time. They brought back examples of abundant fruit, but they also brought back stories of how terrifying it would be to try to take the land. God had promised them that land. Joshua and Caleb were among the spies and they saw what the others saw. However, they also saw the hand of God. What about those Egyptians? What about the Red Sea? Joshua knew. Caleb knew. The others only saw large fortified cities that were occupied by a people much stronger than they were. There is no way this can be done. It’s a suicide mission.

And, from the gloom and doom of the ten spies, our verse is found. The people cried. The people, in the following verse, grumble. Can’t we go back? Why do we have to do this? Fear rather than faith filled their hearts. They saw giants but they never thought of God.

There are some great lessons for us here:

First, it is important to be factual and accurate. They could have hidden the truth. The large branches of grapes is all they could have talked about. But they didn’t. They put the cards on the table. It is important to have all the facts before a decision is made. Some will tell you just what you want to hear and by doing this they are not presenting things honestly. Others are only gloom and doom and black is the only paint color in their bucket.

Second, even in the worst of news, faith and hope in the Lord can bring sunshine and a promise. Notice, Joshua didn’t say the fortified cities were really not that big. They were. And, the people were that strong. And, there were giants. No denying the facts. Some will do that just to try to make things seem optimistic. Joshua could have said, “I never saw any cities,” but that wouldn’t be truthful. God is greater than any troubles. Yes, there were strong cities, but God is stronger. Yes, there were giants, but God is larger than any giant. Doom and despair, whether about health problems, aging parents, church troubles, or marriage issues, can lead us to forgetting about the Lord. God can do things. God can open doors. God can put people in our lives. God is upon the throne.

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Third, it takes real leaders to combat the negative impact that bad news has. This is true in our country, our families, and our congregations. Bad news is a part of life. There will be fortified cities and giants in our lives, however those very things can cripple us and make us hide in fear or our faith can soar with the Lord. This is where dads must shine. Bad news and the kids can get grumpy and want to throw in the towel. Dad leads the way. Faith, hope and trust in the Lord makes all the difference. The same is true in our congregations. Many are suffering these days. Attendance numbers are down in many places. Gloom seems to fill the air. Leaders will find ways to motivate, challenge and build hope in the members. Turning to the pages of the Bible, great lessons can be learned.

Fourth, bad news and negative spirits have a way of taking over a place. It can do that at work. It can do that at home. It can do that in a church. For us, we have the whole Bible. We know how the story ends. We see the triumphant Christ reigning in Revelation. There has been Egyptians and Babylonians and Romans. There has been fiery furnaces and lion's dens and prison walls. But the banner of Christ still flies today. God still reigns today.

The tone at the beginning of worship can set the temperature for the entire worship hour. How we begin, what is said, whether we notice smiles, faith and hope can make that worship encouraging or it can be a long period of misery and discouragement. Don't focus upon who is not there. See who is there. Don't let distractions distract you. Put your eyes upon the Lord. There will be many who want to complain. There will be many who think it's time to return to Egypt. There will be many who think we can't go on. Be a Joshua. Be a person of faith. Don't allow the gloom and doom of others to work it's way into your heart. Walk by faith and not by sight. Sight people see fortified walls. Faith people see those walls coming down. Sight people see giants. Faith people see those giants tumbling. Sight people see strong nations. Faith people see a powerful God.

Our fortified cities and giants may be cancer or a loss of a job or a stinky economy or politics that turn our stomach or prodigals or people who do not like us or the push to agree with those who only vision is through their eyes.

Israel got the land. The walls at Jericho fell. Gideon's reduced army was victorious. Goliath fell before David. Story after story in our Bibles remind us of those two powerful words in Hebrews eleven, "by faith." By faith the mouths of lions were shut. By faith the dead were resurrected. By faith they quenched the power of fire. By faith they escaped the edge of the sword. By faith they put foreign armies to flight.

Joshua saw what the other spies saw. The other spies never saw what Joshua did. He saw the Lord.

Don't let the gloom and doom of others to keep you from seeing the Lord.

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)