



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 # 2207

1 Thessalonians 4:13 "But we do not want you to be uninformed brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope."

Hope is such a powerful word and a necessary part of our lives. Hope is what motivates us and keeps us going. Hope is what the cancer patient hangs on to. Hope is why a losing team believes next year might be better. Hope is what keeps rescuers working through the night trying to find a trapped person. Hope puts a smile on our faces and allows us to welcome the next day.

Here in our passage, the subject is death. Not just any death, but the death of a Christian. Death saddens our hearts and leaves an emptiness among us. There is a hole that just cannot be filled. The color black is connected with death. Those in mourning, years ago, wore black. Some wore it for a long time. However, in this sadness, there was rays of sunshine. There was hope. Even in death there was hope. Through God and with God, even the darkest moments in our lives, find hope. The Psalmist declared, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, Thou art with me. There was hope. There was God.

Interestingly, hope and wishing are not the same. We may wish upon a star or a lucky four-leaf clover, a rabbit's foot, cross our fingers and do all sorts of odd things, such as wearing a lucky outfit when our team plays, because we think that will help them. We wish we got a promotion. We wish for sunny days. We wish the election was over so all the ugly campaign commercials would go away. We wish someone would call today. We wish to find an empty parking space near the front door. Wish and wish and wish. We do it all the time. Wishing and hoping, in our terminology, seems the same. It's not Biblically. Hope was something that was certain to happen. It was built upon the promises of God. The only thing the person didn't know was when it would happen.

Our passage looks at those who have hope and those who do not have hope. Having that hope regulated and effected the way they grieved. The Christian has hope. The Christian has hope when an fellow believer dies. His hope is supported by the promises of God. There will be a resurrection, Jesus said so. Those whose names are in the book of life, will be raised to life. That's the hope for the Christian. As much as he misses his beloved brother in Christ, he knows that the Lord has him. He knows that his suffering is over. He knows the best is right before him. He is finished with temptation, trials and trouble. His journey is complete and awaiting him is the glorious crown of righteousness. He

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in many ways longs to be with his departed brother. He would love to trade places with his departed brother. Home with God is such a comforting thought.

That hope guides his grief. Certainly there will be tears. Certainly there will be an emptiness. However, there is a precious thought of knowing that the departed Christian is with the Lord. He wonders and imagines what that would be like. What must it be like to close your eyes here and then open them on the other side. Those thoughts warm his heart and softens his grief. He presses on, looking for the day when he can join his brother on the other side.

But our passage talks about those who have no hope. For them it's a wish. There is no hope because their loved one never walked with the Lord. They never took time for worship. They never made righteous choices. They never used opportunities to help others. God was ignored in life and now they will be without God in death. Certainly, family members are hoping that they are in Heaven. They hold out for some miracle. I've seen this. I've had to preach those funerals. Someone dies. A funeral is planned. No one knows a preacher because no one in the family worships nor has time for God. A friend of a friend of a friend reaches out to a preacher. Please come. Bring your Bible. Preach dear ole' dad into Heaven. Comfort us. The family who never darkened a church building, never opened a Bible in decades now wants a man of God to pull a rabbit out of his hat and get dad into Heaven. They don't think to call the bartender to say some words. They don't think to call the editor of the sports paper to come and say some words. They don't call the guy at the pro-shop of the local golf course. That's where dear ole' dad spent his time. But now that he's gone, it's time to find religion. It's time to pull strings and get dad into Heaven.

The preacher comes. The Bible is read. Solemn words are spoken. Prayers are offered. There are handshakes, hugs and tears. A week later life goes on. The family doesn't change. The Bible isn't read. No one shows up at worship. All continues the same until the next funeral and then a mad scramble to find us a preacher. This is all too common.

What basis does someone have for hope here? Someone who never truly believed in God. Someone if he ever mentioned God, it was in cursing. No, there is no hope. They wish. They want. They convince themselves, but upon what basis? No faith. No love for the Lord. No choices reflecting God. No desire for Heaven when alive. No righteousness. No spiritual life what-so-ever. If a college student never went to class, never did any of the assignments, flunked every test, he may wish he would pass, but there would be no hope of his passing.

Hope and wishing are not the same. We have hope. It's built around our faith in the Lord. Our hope is lived every day by our choices to walk with the Lord. Our hope is illustrated through prayers and worship. God is near to us. God is part of our lives. And when our time here is finished, it will be to God that we go. There's a promise that stands behind all of us. God's grace and our faith untied and makes all of this possible.

Living with hope or living with a wish. Not the same. Everyone wants to go to Heaven, but only a few actually act that way. Our lives are structured around God's word. It is here that our hope is built and sustained.

My hope is built on nothing less...

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)



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