



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)

November 24, 2024

Jump Start # 3250

Romans 1:10 "always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you."

Our verse today draws the curtain back on the heart of Paul. He longed to come and see the Roman brethren. The various translations show this:

NAS: if perhaps now at last

ESV: if somehow

Phillips: somehow make it possible

In essence, the apostle was asking, “whatever it takes, Lord, get me to Rome.” This was something he really desired. He really wanted to see them. In love stories the man says, “I’ll climb the highest mountain and swim the deepest sea to be with you.” But for the apostle, he was putting all of this in the Lord’s hands. His prayer was for the Lord to make it possible. And, that’s exactly what happened. What a journey it was. Luke covers it in the final chapters of Acts. It began as Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, nearly murdered more than once, he travels on a ship that goes through a violent storm, capsizes, and is nearly killed by soldiers, he makes it to an island and is bit by a poisonous snake. Finally, he makes it to Rome where he is put in prison. It was a journey that took several years. It was a journey that included prisons, death threats and trials. But he got to Rome. The Lord took him to Rome. But it certainly wasn’t as Paul planned or dreamed it would be. It took a lot longer and it was a lot harder than he would have ever expected.

Had Paul known what it would take to get him to Rome, he may have had second thoughts. God got him there, but what a journey it was. It wasn’t the next day, the next week, or even the next month.

Now, some things we can learn from this:

First, often God’s Plan A is not ours. In fact, what God has planned for us may not even be on our list. How we envision things is not how the Lord does. A nice sunny boat ride in the summer may

(OVER)

have been in Paul's mind. Instead, sailing as a prisoner and going at the wrong time of year, the storms were so violent that the ship capsized. All through that journey, faith was required. Things were hard. Paul got his prayer answered, but it sure wasn't that smooth summer trip through calm waters.

Second, God's answer to our prayers is often a long journey that we never anticipated. The journey through grief can be that way. The journey through a health issue certainly can be that way. We pray and we want the problem solved and out of our lives. God has boat rides through turbulent waters in mind. We want things resolved today. God has a few years for us to journey with this. Paul sitting in a Jerusalem prison may have thought that the Lord wasn't going to answer his prayer.

Third, it takes incredible faith to say, "Whatever it takes, Lord." We may want the Lord to do the incredible all the while we stay safely on the shoreline. The "whatever it takes" for Paul was a journey. Luke gives us more details about that journey than he does most of the conversions in Acts. Cargo thrown overboard. Contrary winds. Floating in the sea. Guards ready to kill. Not once do we find Paul saying, "I changed my mind, Lord. I don't want to go to Rome. Take me back home."

Whatever it takes:

- Could you say, "Whatever it takes, Lord, I want my children to be saved?" Whatever it takes. That "whatever it takes," may require switching schools, home schooling, or even moving. It may mean finding another congregation to worship with. If it means your child spends a day feeding the pigs like the prodigal, but that experience brings him back to God, could you say, "Whatever it takes, Lord."

I wonder if we want to keep the boat next to the dock, and our "whatever it takes," is nothing radical, unusual or extreme. And, when we put qualifiers like that on situations, then do we really want our children to be saved? I want them to be saved, as long as I don't have to do anything hard. I want them to be saved as long as people do not think that we are weird. Whatever it takes, Lord.

- Could you say, "Whatever it takes, Lord, I want the church to grow." What if that "whatever it takes," means you invite your neighbors and co-workers to worship with you? What if that "whatever it takes," means teaching a class or having families into your home? What if "whatever it takes," means you stepping up and being a shepherd? Whatever it takes can often mean, whatever the preacher does or whatever the church does, but not me.

Paul had an understanding that the spiritual was far more important than the physical. The spiritual was far more important than his personal comfort. It was more important than his safety. That spirit led Paul to go to the extreme. He'd do anything.

Extreme faith looks so different than safe and comfortable faith. It looks so different than what everyone else is doing. A faith that will not call it a day. A faith that goes above and beyond what is expected. A faith that won't stop easily.

Whatever it takes, I want to go to Heaven. What if that meant, no TV in your house? What if that meant no more vacations? What if that meant pushing yourself to the limit?

Whatever it takes...what a thought.

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)
